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CROSS VENERATION IN THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC WORLD

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND PRACTICE UNDER MUSLIM RULE

CHARLES TIESZEN

THE EARLY AND MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC WORLD

Charles Tieszen is Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Fuller Theological Seminary. He received his PhD from the University of Birmingham and is the author of *Christian Identity amid Islam in Medieval Spain* and *A Textual History of Christian–Muslim Relations*.

'*Cross Veneration in the Medieval Islamic World* is a subtle and admirable work. It traces the career of one of the most significant *topoi* used by Christian authors at the heart of the medieval Islamic power. The result is a fascinating six-century journey through numerous Christian and Islamic authors and texts. In his insightful study Tieszen has found a series of illuminating perspectives that help to discover the Christian religious identity of those conflicted days … This is an exceedingly useful work that offers a rich store of insights into Christian–Muslim relations.'

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Frank Griffel, Professor of Islamic Studies, Yale University

'Charles Tieszen takes us on a sweeping tour through a controversy that consumed Christians and Muslims through much of the Middle Ages: was it permissible to venerate the cross, and in so doing, to worship Jesus as the resurrected God? Tapping an array of sources in different languages, Tieszen shows how Christians and Muslims polemicised against each other over this central issue, and in the process, came to ever more refined understandings of their own beliefs and doctrines. This book will be a valuable reference for anyone interested in the history of Christianity in the Islamic Middle East, interreligious dialogue and theology.'

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Christian Identity and Practice under Muslim Rule

CHARLES TIESZEN

I.B.TAURIS
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For Brahm, Jonathan, Rene and Vanessa

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I try to follow; and to my son, Brahm, who asked a question over lunch ('What is God?') and discovered with me the shape of humanity. With each of these cherished ones acknowledged here, O God, I pray: 'Make us an icon for [You] in truth, that in ourselves here, as in a clear mirror, [Your] outline may be perceived' (Theodore Abū Qurrah, ninth century).

INTRODUCTION

TRACING THE LIFE OF A THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL IDEA

It was in Egypt sometime around the close of the seventh century that Isaac, Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria (d. 692/3), visited the Muslim emir ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 685–705).[1] Not long before, according to a biographer of Isaac's life, 'some Saracens who hated [the Christian] faith went to [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz] and accused [Isaac], saying "Behold! you honor Isaac and receive him to yourself, but he abominates both us and our faith"'.[2] The accusation did not square with what ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz knew about Isaac. In fact, Isaac and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz met regularly and the two got along reasonably well. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was even fond of Isaac, considering him a faithful citizen and man of God.[3] 'The words you speak are lies', he responded.[4]

Isaac's accusers were not satisfied with ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's rebuff and devised a plan. 'If you want to know that he hates both us and our faith and that the words we have spoken to you are truths, then have him eat with you from the [same] dish and the food that is on it, without making [the sign of] the cross. If he does not make it, then know that all the things we have said to you are lies'.[5] In other words, if Isaac made the sign of the cross over his food before he ate, as was his custom, then he would actually be the emir's enemy. If, however, he did not make the sign of the cross, then he would indeed be the emir's friend. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz agreed to the scheme.

And so it was that Isaac visited the emir. They assembled along with a host of Muslim officials including ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's entourage. When all were seated, a basket of dates was served and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ordered Isaac to eat first. Isaac took the basket, looked toward ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and cleverly

inquired, 'From which place would you like me to eat? This place or that place? Here or there?'[6] In two crafty strokes, the patriarch made the sign of the cross over the dates, disguising the motions as questions about whether he should select a date from the top or the bottom, the left or the right, of the basket. None the wiser, 'Abd al-'Azīz was sure he had made Isaac eat without making the sign of the cross. When his advisers told him otherwise, however, 'Abd al-'Azīz was amazed and exclaimed, 'Truly, I have never found a man as wise as [Isaac]!'[7]

This story from Isaac's life is framed with a bit of hagiography: the Christian finds himself in the midst of those who oppose him and he miraculously confounds them, earning the admiration of the emir. The story's hagiographical frame is even given a biblical edge when the biographer notes that Isaac's triumph was not unlike 'the prophet Daniel before the kings of the Chaldeans and the Persians'.[8] Despite this way of framing the event, the biography of Isaac's life reveals something of the nature of Christian–Muslim relations in seventh-century Egypt. And the story about the patriarch, the emir and the basket of dates in particular demonstrates that the symbol of the cross and the ways this symbol was used could be a point around which Muslims and Christians encountered one another.[9]

Muslims were often perplexed by the posture Christians took toward the cross and often showed great antipathy for the symbol of the cross in general. Of course, the Qur'ān speaks relatively ambiguously about the crucifixion, stating that the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) claim to have killed Jesus and flatly repudiating the idea that he died. Instead, the Qur'ān reveals, God raised Jesus (*rafa'ahu*) up to himself (4:156–9).[10] Alongside the denial that Christ died upon a cross came the Muslim repudiation that such an event was the necessity that Christian doctrine made it. To select one example from a large corpus of Muslim reflection, the Andalusī Mālikī jurist Abū l-Walīd al-Bājī discusses the matter when he responds to a French monk in the early eleventh century about some of Christianity's confusions, or what he concludes are the 'brayings of [Christians'] asses'.[11] For al-Bājī, the Christian claim that Christ's cross was the locus of humanity's salvation was among 'the strangest things' Christians put forward as a part of their faith.[12] The notion that Christ gave his blood and died presented numerous contradictions with respect to Christ's alleged two natures. Did this happen to his divine nature or his human nature? Either answer was a theological pitfall in

al-Bājī's mind. Further, it hardly seemed an appropriate act for someone who was supposed to be divine and all-powerful.[13] For al-Bājī, as for many Muslim intellectuals who engaged with Christian Christology, the cross was theologically unnecessary.[14] As such, it constituted blindness reaching a rather steep 'pitch of plain ignorance'.[15] In short, and despite the Qur'ān's rather terse treatment of the topic, the crucifixion, for Muslims, was not something that happened to Jesus. The cross was an extreme affront and Muslim traditions even depict Jesus as a judge who will return to earth in the last days and smash crosses.[16]

When it came to Christian veneration of the cross, the practice could be a public act that dramatised Christian doctrine. In venerating the cross, Christians animated their belief in Christ's divinity and in his redemptive work. It is little wonder, then, that despite the fact that the Qur'ān does not mention cross veneration, Muslims pounced upon the act as unbelief and an example of idolising an abhorrent symbol. For them, Christians were *mushrikūn*, or polytheists, because they ascribed partners to God (*shirk*) by divinising Jesus. This, along with Christians' belief that Christ was crucified, made the cross an affront to God and a rejection of the revelation he communicated via his messengers.[17] Hence, it also made Christians idolaters.[18] Sometimes the resulting discussions between Muslims and Christians about the cross were antagonistic or resulted in various kinds of persecution. At other times discussions about the cross merely indicate a context of inter-religious exchange. In any case, the Christian posture towards the cross was very often a literal one and Muslims write frequently of their concern over Christians bowing towards or kissing crosses.

In particular, Muslims often write to accuse Christians, declaring that the act was tantamount to idolatry and demanding an explanation. For example, the Muslim caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ('Umar II; r. 717–20) allegedly writes to Byzantine emperor Leo III (r. 717–41) and says, 'you worship the cross and the image [of Christ], kiss them, and bow before them, even though they are only the product of human work which can neither hear nor see, which can neither help nor harm, and the ones you esteem the most are the images made of gold and silver. In fact it is in this way that the people of Abraham behaved with their images and idols'.[19] For 'Umar, the cross was a powerless object made by human hands. As such, it was not worthy of the honour Christians offered to it. Adorning crosses with precious metals, as some Christian communities

did, only further implanted the suspicion in 'Umar's mind that Christians were fashioning idols for worship.

In an account, possibly written in the ninth century, of an exchange between Wāṣil, a captive Muslim from Damascus, and Bashīr, a Byzantine nobleman, Wāṣil says, 'I am going to ask you a question, my son. Do you worship the cross as a likeness for Jesus, Mary's son, because he was crucified?'[20] The question is really a trap, for it forces Bashīr to concede that the cross symbolised a humiliating event that was undeserving of honour. Towards the end of the account, Wāṣil corners the king, presumably Leo III, and says, 'Do you not worship what you have made with your hands? This is what is in your churches'. The king concedes that Christians have made their religion 'like the religion of the people of the idols' (*ahl al-awthān*).[21] The story helps to confirm in Muslim readers' minds that Christianity was a stumbling monotheism.

In the mid-ninth century, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, a former East-Syrian Christian who converted to Islam late in his life, attacked his former faith in his *Al-Radd 'alā l-Naṣārā* (*Refutation of the Christians*). He wondered why Christians make crosses and wear them and why they make the sign of the cross. He even mocked his former co-religionists when he writes, 'You make a wooden [cross] with your hands and hang it around your necks!'[22]

In the eleventh century, Ibn Ḥazm, one of the greatest Muslim intellectuals to emerge from al-Andalus, the regions controlled by Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula, responded to an earlier Christian anti-Muslim text. Like the Christian text, Ibn Ḥazm wrote his refutation as a poem (*qaṣīdah*):

> How dare you brag of a Trinitarian faith?
> So removed from reason, so out of place?
> Worshiping a being who has a worshiping face!
> Woe to you! Where is your sanity and brain?
> Your gospels are tampered with in every place.
> And in them, words of truth are often slain.
> You bow still to a wooden cross.
> Woe to you! Where is your sanity and brain?[23]

For Ibn Ḥazm, Christianity departed from logic and reason. Its scriptural texts were thoroughly corrupt and Christians foolishly worshiped an object made with human hands.

Many more of these kinds of Muslim assessments and accusations are represented in Christian texts that functioned, in part, to defend and justify the practice of cross veneration. This book is about how medieval Christians responded to the Muslim charge of idolatrous cross worship and the tactics they deployed to explain their practice of cross veneration. A number of scholars consider Christian veneration of the cross in Islamic milieus. Most notably, Mark Swanson devotes a section to the topic in a dissertation that focuses on Arabic-speaking Christian discussion of the cross.[24] Sidney Griffith devotes a number of essays to Christians living under Muslim rule and their devotion to sacred images.[25] Gerrit Reinink and Herman Teule devote several articles to defences of cross veneration that appear in Syriac.[26] From these scholars, along with many others, we have a helpful body of secondary sources along with editions and translations of primary sources from which to learn. Even so, these studies either focus on more general discussions of the cross and Christology, the history of images and iconography in Islamic milieus, or the reflections of one particular author on the topic of cross veneration. This book attempts a modest corrective to what might otherwise be a slightly fragmentary treatment of texts that are, as a result, rhetorically decontextualised. Instead of exploring one particular exchange between a Christian and a Muslim over cross veneration or a few key authors' defences of the practice, this book investigates medieval apologetic, debate and disputational literature[27] written roughly between the eighth century and the fourteenth century.[28] Almost every known text from this period that is written in an Islamic milieu and in which an argument concerning cross veneration appears is examined. Most of these texts are written by Christians, but others that I examine, like the accusations that appear above, are from Muslims. In the end, 40 main texts appear in the book and readers may consult the appendices for bibliographical information about the main texts under examination. The result is a focused examination of how a variety of Christians living under various kinds of Muslim rule defended and explained their devotion to the cross.

Examining a large number of texts in this way is not an easy task. But doing so means that something more specific can be achieved than merely considering generalisations about a number of Christian–Muslim encounters that took place over a wide range of time and geographies. Similarly, with this approach much more can be said about one particular

and significant feature of Christian–Muslim relations than simply commenting in a very focused way on one particular text. By concentrating on the topic of cross veneration and considering how medieval Christian and Muslim authors approached it, it is possible to trace the life of cross veneration as an idea, as it is told from the perspective of medieval disputational literature written in Islamic milieus. When and under what conditions did Christians in these milieus first have to defend the practice? How did the topic emerge in contexts predominated by the religion of Islam and Muslim rulers? Did defences of cross veneration take new shape over time? Do they diminish over time?

Questions like these touch upon a variety of issues and readers will undoubtedly be drawn to wider discussions of the cross like Muslim analyses of the cross's function in Christian theology, examinations of the historicity of the cross or even considerations of fragments of the True Cross. This book necessarily focuses on the Christian practice of venerating the cross and how they defended this act of devotion to Muslims who questioned or ridiculed it. As a result, though some of the peripheral topics will be addressed in order to provide necessary context (this is particularly the case when it comes to the nuances of Muslim antipathy for the cross), many of these topics will remain beyond the reach of this book.

By this point readers may indeed wonder, why cross veneration? One should not be surprised by discussions of certain topics commonly found in apologetic literature written by Christians and Muslims: the Trinity, Christology or the nature of scripture for example. To some readers, however, cross veneration, especially relative to other theological topics like the aforementioned ones, may be unexpected. In fact, Christian defences of cross veneration and the Muslim accusations of idolatry that are related to them appear frequently in medieval apologies and debates, especially in the eighth, ninth, and even tenth centuries. Though less frequently, they continue to appear through the fourteenth century and so discussions of cross veneration, far from being marginal, are actually a topos of medieval Christian–Muslim disputational literature.

One of the reasons for the idea's frequent appearance in these texts is that the symbol of the cross is connected to substantial theological doctrines related to Christ's crucifixion, death and resurrection. In this way, the cross symbolised some of the major Christian doctrines to which Muslims objected and, in turn, the main lines dividing Christian and

Islamic theology. By venerating the cross, Christians not only dramatised these differences, but as I have noted above, the practice also appeared to Muslims to be underlining their suspicions that Christians were guilty of idolatry and attributing partners to God (*shirk*).[29] As a result, many Christian authors, besides responding directly to Muslim accusations, also chose to address cross veneration alongside their attempts to elucidate other theological topics.

Perhaps more significant, however, were the political dimensions of cross veneration. Of course, from the fourth century, when Constantine (d. 337) adopted the cross as his sign, the cross took on political value as an imperial symbol for Christians. In this sense, Muslim antipathy for the symbol of the cross could be connected to opposition towards the Byzantine Empire that attributed victory to the cross.[30] Many Christian authors included in this book, however, did not have the advantage of being associated with imperial power; almost all of them were subordinate citizens living under Muslim rulers. So when Christian authors in Islamic milieus addressed cross veneration in apologetic texts and disputational literature they were often engaged in smaller scale politics. They were writing their texts to help their readers make sense of and navigate new contexts of inter-religious contact. Of course, in some cases Muslims and Christians were engaged in the process of coming to understand one another's practices. In many other cases, however, these discussions were intended by authors to produce specific results among their primary audiences.

With this in mind, one of the predominant motivations for the authors of the Christian texts was a concern to assert the unique truth of Christianity over Islam. The concern was much the same for Muslim authors who used their texts to clarify and affirm the ways Islam had superseded Christianity. Hence, while it is true that the texts in this book cover a wide range of times, cultures and geographies and are connected to unique languages, religions and religious traditions, audiences and literary genres, there is a considerable continuity in what motivated the authors to write them. In situations where competing truth claims exerted influence over religious communities, authors would respond with efforts to help readers navigate their multi-religious contexts and adhere to what authors argued was superior truth. But making a claim for absolute truth was not just an exercise that could demonstrate the intellectual prowess of an author. Even more, there is a pastoral edge to many of these texts whereby

convincing readers of religious truth could in turn safeguard a community from the dangerous or allegedly false claims of another faith. In this way, many authors were concerned to protect their communities from conversion, to nourish beleaguered communities affected by the strain of persecution or mockery, or to ensure that acculturating to linguistic or cultural environments did not also dilute the distinctions of a community's religious faith. Taken together, the concern for a community's adherence to superior religious truth can be re-articulated as an author's effort to define a community's religious identity. What identified a religious community as distinct from the other communities that existed within a given milieu?

Generally speaking, the concern to define communal religious identity was addressed by authors in two essential ways, and texts often evince a mixture of these two elements. In the first, many authors wrote texts in order to defend their religious truth claims. They tried to make clear, for example, why it was that God was strictly one or a Trinity in Unity, how Christ became located in the Virgin Mary or why Muḥammad's office of prophethood was universal and not limited to Arabia. These efforts were carried out in contexts where the truth claims of one community were challenged by the claims of another. Hence, authors wrote texts in order to defend and reassert the boundary lines that defined distinct religious communities.

In a second means by which to define communal religious identity, many authors directly attacked the other's religion. For example, when a Christian author assaults the morality of Muḥammad, he surely hopes that his readers will be convinced by the Christian truth that remained standing as his attack upon the Prophet forced Muḥammad to crumble in defeat. Similarly, when Muslim authors attacked the history of Christianity's development, claiming that it was built on idolatrous and manipulated foundations, they likely hoped Christian claims would collapse before their readers' eyes and leave Islam as the only truly pure monotheistic religion. Readers who were convinced by these tactics would become more firmly planted in their religion and would not waver under the tempting influences of other religious claims. Their religious identity would be safeguarded and made firm.

Of course, authors employed other tactics – apocalyptic readings of historical events, for example – but defending one's own view or attacking that of another, such as the apologetic and disputational texts

in this book do, could be brought into service as tools to assert the superiority of one religion over the other. Thus, even when one writes in an ostensibly appreciative way of the other's religious tenets, an opponent's claims are made subservient to the correct interpretation that only a superior text or religious framework could provide. These tactics work quite well in apologetic or polemical treatises. But even those that are historical accounts often use material germane to Christian–Muslim disputational literature in order to say something to their readers about how they might understand their position in life vis-à-vis Muslim rulers and Islam. With this in mind, the features that draw these wide-ranging texts together are concerns that adherents of one religion will not blur the lines that made religious communities distinct, regardless of the ways different religious communities acculturated culture and language. In all of this, religious identity was at stake and authors were working hard in their own ways to define what they believed to be the correct religious identity of their communities.

In particular, veneration of the cross and the Christian devotion to its sign was one way of making public the political dimensions of one's faith and highlighting religious identity. Returning to Isaac, the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria, the shape of the cross could be subversive and authors could use stories about it, as did Isaac's biographer, to say something about how Christian communities might see themselves in light of the Islamic milieus in which they lived. In the case of those who read about Isaac's life, the sign of the cross was a reminder of the power it held to confound those who opposed it. Christian communities like the ones over which Patriarch Isaac shepherded may have lived under Muslim rule, but that need not weaken their grasp upon what was to them superior religious truth. In this way, discussions of symbols like the cross, not to mention other kinds of religious images, and the postures people took toward them were as much political as they were theological.[31]

Indeed, many authors seek to explain why Christians venerated the cross and the theological value Christians attributed to it. Sometimes these explanations are pointed at Muslims as a response to their suspicions that Christians worshiped the cross as an idol. At many other times, explanations of cross veneration work to underscore the significance of the practice to Christian communities and how it helped to delineate the differences between them and Muslim communities. For this reason,

tracing the life of cross veneration will mean looking at how authors explained the practice theologically and how they used the practice politically in order to form and police the religious identities of the communities to whom they wrote. In these ways, cross veneration becomes a central point at which Christians and Muslims encounter one another in both conversation and debate.

Since the cross carried with it important theological and political ramifications, its function as a symbol becomes important and it is often discussed alongside other symbols like Christian icons. For this reason, a few important clarifications must be addressed at the outset of this study. The first clarification can be tended to briefly. While there is a relationship between icons and crosses as Christian symbols, they are also distinct symbols and functioned differently in different Christian communities. The subject of icons – one need only think of Byzantine iconoclastic controversies here – is a vast one. Because of the enormity of the topic of icons, I will not focus on defences of iconophilia in this book and will only include discussions of religious images beyond crosses when doing so is directly related to venerating the cross. This is especially the case in Chapter 1 where a discussion of the historical context of cross veneration necessarily includes consideration for how religious images in general were viewed.

The second clarification concerns the religious traditions adhered to by the authors we examine. Since most of them are Christians, it will be helpful to many readers to understand here the variety of Christian confessions represented. Predominant among the medieval Christian traditions in regions under Muslim rule, especially among the authors represented in this book, were those who adhered to Chalcedonian orthodoxy – the Christological confession advocated by the Byzantine emperor and formulated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. These Chalcedonians came to be known as Melkites (from the Syriac *malkāyā* and the Arabic *malakī*, meaning 'royal' and thereby implying that they were 'imperialists' who joined with the Byzantine emperor). Melkite communities took their shape after the emergence of Islam and were among the first Christian communities to adopt Arabic as a spoken and ecclesiastical language.[32] There were also other Christian communities that formed before the rise of Islam, though their identities grew more solidified during the first few centuries of Islam. These were the West-Syrian Miaphysite (also Monophysite or Jacobite) communities – those

believing in a single, undivided nature in Christ – and East-Syrian communities (Nestorians or Church of the East) – those believing in two, separately existing natures in Christ. These two communities comprised primarily Syriac speakers. There were also the Copts in Egypt who used Coptic and shared a miaphysite theology.[33]

The differences between these Christian traditions were not limited to Christological confessions. Each community celebrated different liturgies and languages and practised varying liturgical devotions. Most important for this study, this means that these communities devoted themselves in a variety of ways to icons and crosses in worship. Some traditions had churches with abundant icons while other communities did not favour them at all. Some showed a preference for aniconic crosses while there is evidence of others incorporating crosses with corpora. For example, some early medieval West-Syrian Christians favoured aniconic church decoration. During the same periods, however, evidence exists for embellished ornamentation in West-Syrian churches. To further complicate the matter, varying evidence exists among influential churches and more marginal village churches.[34] Similarly, the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurrah, in his ninth-century treatise *A Treatise on the Veneration of Holy Icons*, defends devotion to the icon of Christ crucified, having in mind the church in Edessa that bore the icon's name (as well as Christian images and crosses in general). In the same century, an anonymous Melkite author also writes to defend Christian devotion to the cross, but does so with an aniconic cross in mind and pays less attention to the role icons might play in Christian prayer.[35] Of course, this does not necessarily indicate that icons were absent in this author's context, but it does suggest that when it came to icons and crosses, Melkite authors felt differently about where to place an accent on their importance. Finally, East-Syrian Christians are normally thought to have rejected icons in their churches or to have favoured devotion to crosses in their place. However, a number of East-Syrian texts, as we shall see, provide evidence for the defence of Christian crosses and images and their use in worship well into the fourteenth century.[36] The worship and devotional practices of these communities was hardly uniform and great variety is attested.[37] As a result, I will only make special mention in relevant sections when particularities related to confessional worship are important to context or are discernible from textual evidence.

Another clarification concerns the terms 'symbol' (and the related word 'sign'), of which an icon (*eikōn*) and a cross are examples, and 'veneration'. The word 'symbol' has taken on a generic meaning for many today. In such cases a symbol merely represents something and may therefore have no special meaning or value. Even in some religious contexts, symbols are, for many, only simple indicators. An image of the Good Shepherd, for example, represents Christ – and therefore is a symbol of Christ – but may only serve as a reminder for some aspect or function of Christ's life. To many modern viewers, such an image is very nearly arbitrary, completely dialectical and might be easily replaced by another image. Further, there are many today who would find it difficult to look at a symbol and not locate a line that divides an image or a copy from that which it represents, a prototype or an original. This was not the case in the ancient and medieval worlds.

Surveying antique and medieval thought on religious symbols would require far too much space, so I will describe as briefly as I can the complexity of the concept of symbol as it was understood for Eastern Christians during the late antique and early medieval periods. The theological reflection offered in these periods formed the bases for many later theological treatments and understandings of religious symbols for Eastern Christian communities. One can begin with Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in the early sixth century. His thought on sacred images was significant enough for it to have been a source for both iconoclasts and iconodules in the eighth and ninth centuries.[38] For Dionysius, though he acknowledged a difference between a symbol (*symbolon*) and what it symbolised, he emphasised what the symbol and what it depicted had in common. As Moshe Barasch summarises, for Dionysius a symbol 'is not only a sign, but is actually the thing itself'.[39] Therefore the line dividing symbol and symbolised is faint and porous in Dionysian thought.

It is much the same in the eighth and ninth centuries for John of Damascus (d. 749) and Theodore the Stoudite (d. 826). For them, there was a necessary relationship between an image and its prototype. This is less apparent in John's work where, though he recognises a relationship, writes that 'the image is certainly not like the archetype, that is, what is depicted, in every respect – for the image is one thing and what it depicts is another – and certainly a difference is seen between them, since they are not identical'.[40] Clearly there is a relationship for John

between an icon and what it represents, though he is hesitant to make them identical to one another.[41]

Theodore is more explicit. 'The prototype and the image belong to the category of related things', he writes and the image necessarily follows from the prototype.[42] 'The prototype and the image have their being, as it were, in each other'.[43] Theodore goes on to employ the admittedly limited metaphor of an object and its shadow. 'If the shadow cannot be separated from the body [. . .] in the same way Christ's own image cannot be separated from Him'.[44] As one implication of this connection between Christ and symbols depicting him, many writers ascribe miraculous power to religious icons and Theodore writes that the symbol of the cross had the power to burn demons.[45] For Theodore and others like him, the symbolised dwells in the symbol and is made manifest. They are not to be equated, but they are to be understood together.[46] In this way, Theodore makes the relationship between symbol and symbolised much more explicit than John of Damascus.

A nearly ubiquitous metaphor used to explain this relationship, a topos in literature discussing religious symbols and one that will appear throughout this book, is the image of the emperor. That an emperor's image could be recast in various materials and still retain its identity with the actual, living emperor was a provocative concept for those reflecting on the nature of religious icons.[47] This metaphor could be used to illustrate the relationship between an original (the emperor himself) and copies (representations of him as statues, imprints on coins, etc.) and applied to the nature of icons and crosses as symbols. The emperor metaphor could also help to elucidate the honour paid to an emperor's image. When one bowed before it or kissed it, the honour was not really being given to a representation. Because of the innate relationship between copy and original, honour passed from image to prototype, from a representation of the emperor to the emperor himself. With this in mind, references to 'symbol' or 'sign' in this book, when they are used to refer to religious icons and crosses and the figures and events they symbolised, carry with them this kind of complexity where there is an understood relationship between original and copy, prototype and image.

This brings us to a final clarification concerning the term 'veneration'. To venerate an object was to bow (*proskynēsis*) before or even kiss (*aspasmos*) it. Frequently in texts discussing veneration of the cross, the

shape of the cross is also given consideration. In turn, making the sign of the cross, the vertical and horizontal strokes made over one's forehead and chest or over an object, is important in the literature I analyse and becomes part of the way one can honour the cross and even enact its inherent power. Of course, it was this act of veneration, offered to objects in the shape of the cross, that perplexed and concerned Muslims. In this light, when Muslims accused Christians of idolatry with respect to veneration, it was because they observed them bowing before crosses, kissing them and making their sign.

But Muslims were not the first to be scandalised by the Christian practice of venerating crosses. In fact, there is a much wider history of condemning and defending cross veneration. This book begins in Chapter 1, therefore, by taking a closer look at the historical and literary context of apologetic discussions of cross veneration and the place the practice had in the wider context of Christian religious symbols. This historical examination begins with the pagan and Jewish contexts, for it was among members of these communities where Christian veneration of crosses first appeared suspect. In fact, it was in *Adversus Judaeos* literature – the body of texts written by Christians responding to Jewish literary attacks upon images and crosses – that something of a tradition developed that set in place the most common explanations for Christian veneration of the cross. Eventually, of course, these discussions made their way into Islamic contexts. Hence, Chapter 1 will also discuss Islamic views of religious symbols and how the symbol of the cross became such a focal point of religious and political controversy between Muslim and Christian communities. As will become clear, it is this broad historical context that frames the apologetic and disputational texts Muslims and Christians wrote in the medieval period that included the idea of cross veneration.

In Chapter 2, I begin to analyse the main texts devoted to cross veneration that emerge from medieval Islamic milieus. In this chapter, I consider texts where there is an emphasis upon acknowledging Muslim accusations of idolatry and deflecting them back towards Islam. In texts where this approach is an emphasis, Christian authors deploy polemical counterattacks meant to expose the polytheistic roots of Islam and suggest that Muslims unknowingly perpetuate idolatry, especially in their adoration of the Black Stone of the Ka'bah. For these authors, adoration of the cross was the mark of true monotheism. Of course,

Muslim authors could play this game as well, and so Muslim texts are also examined. Particularly significant are those that attempt to expose the manipulative foundations of Christianity and Christian history with reference to the practice of venerating crosses.

In Chapter 3 there is a noticeable shift from texts that focus on counterattacks to those that actually attempt to explain the meaning and function of cross veneration. With these texts, consideration is given to the symbolic nature of the cross and the strategies authors utilised in order to illuminate the reasons why Christians incorporated cross veneration in their worship. It is here where the main contours of the tradition of defending and explaining cross veneration, stretching back to *Adversus Judaeos* literature, are discernible.

Finally, I consider in Chapter 4 the most innovative defences of cross veneration. In these texts we see authors being the most explicit in their designation of the cross and its veneration as a marker of unique Christian identity. Here it becomes clear that in milieus increasingly shaped by Arabic and Islam, many of these authors, even as they demonstrate the absorption of Arabic language and culture and Islamic thought forms, would have their communities identifiable by the shape of the cross and a posture of adoration towards this symbol.

One of the challenges of a book like this is the matter of arranging a large number of texts. Since the book's aim is to trace the life of cross veneration as a theological and political idea in Islamic milieus, I arrange the texts thematically, not chronologically. This is especially helpful since arguments applied to defending cross veneration did not develop chronologically, but were applied by their authors in a piecemeal fashion. In this light, a thematic structure eases the work readers must do in navigating through a large corpus of literature. But this arrangement also means that it becomes difficult to fully contextualise each text when it appears under a given theme. For this reason, while I have taken care to articulate each text's necessary context, I have included two appendices: Appendix I is a summary of each text along with information regarding what is known about authors; an abbreviated form of this appendix appears as a table for easy reference in Appendix II.

CHAPTER 1

STUMBLING OVER IMAGES AND CROSSES

At the dawn of the ninth century, or at least sometime after 799, Theodore Abū Qurrah (*c.*755–*c.*830), a Melkite Christian bishop of Ḥarrān in Mesopotamia, wrote *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*. He addressed the treatise to Abba Yannah, presumably an official at the Church of the Icon of Christ in Edessa.[1] In it, Abū Qurrah describes a curious dilemma facing the Christian community there. He announces his main concern and the occasion of his treatise in this way:

> many Christians are abandoning prostration to the image of Christ ... {because} Anti-Christians, especially ones claiming to have in hand a scripture sent down from God {i.e., Muslims}, are reprimanding them for their prostration to these icons, and because of it they are imputing to them the worship of idols, and the transgression of what God commanded in the Torah and the Prophets, and they sneer at them.[2]

Essentially, Muslims were challenging the theology depicted in Christian icons, especially the icon in Edessa of Christ crucified and jeering at Christian veneration of the icon. In particular, Muslims were accusing Christians of idolatry and departing from the Old Testament proscriptions of idols. In turn, Christians began to reject icons, either for fear of the taunts Muslims directed at them or the doctrinal reprimands to which they might otherwise be subjected. In the remaining sections of the treatise, Abū Qurrah urged the Christian community in Edessa to preserve

their devotion to the icon of Christ crucified and he commended the Christian practice of bowing before the cross.

Abū Qurrah's context was unique, arising as it did from an overwhelmingly Islamic frame of reference. But the sources to which he turned in order to structure his treatise and the strategies he deployed to strengthen his arguments, the ingenuity of his treatise notwithstanding, were not altogether his own. In fact, readers who follow Abū Qurrah's arguments and sources can trace them back in time to discover a long tradition of Christians defending their use of images and veneration of crosses in worship.

In this light, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. One of its main concerns is to develop the wider contexts of Christian defences of cross veneration. As will become clear, this practice was not just a stumbling block for Muslims, but was also a point of contention for followers of religions prior to the emergence Islam. Understanding these different contexts will add necessary perspective regarding the Christian–Muslim texts that become the focus of this book. It will also reveal the sources and traditions from which authors drew in order to make their defences of venerating crosses and images.

In considering the historical contexts from which defences of cross veneration emerged, it is important to see that discussions about the cross as a symbol must be situated within broader discussions about Christian icons and other kinds of religious symbols (mosaics, statues, etc.). In this chapter, then, our discussion will necessarily touch upon matters related to Christian religious symbols in general, not just crosses and crucifixes in particular.

With the advent of Islam, discussions surrounding the Christian use of images, and especially Christian veneration of crosses, enter a new context. The other main concern of this chapter, then, is to elucidate the development of the varying Islamic views of religious images and the Christian cross. It will be important here to understand the political and doctrinal motivations for how Muslims thought about images – the ones they used and those of other religious communities that they at times abused. In turn, understanding the Islamic views of images will help to frame the analyses of texts written in Islamic milieus. In these ways, this chapter very much forms the literary and historical background for the rest of the book.

Explaining Veneration of the Cross and Images in Pagan Contexts

It should not be assumed that discussions concerning the Christian use of religious symbols – be they icons, crosses or otherwise – were limited to monotheists. To begin with, pagans were also known to defend their use of images. The Emperor Julian (*c.*331–63), a convert from Christianity to paganism, takes up a spirited apology of image veneration:

> Therefore when we look at the images of the gods, let us not indeed think that they are stones or wood, but neither let us think they are the gods themselves; and indeed we do not say that the statues of the emperors are mere wood and stone and bronze, but still less do we say that they are the emperors themselves. He who loves the emperor delights to see the emperor's statue, and he who loves his son delights to see his son's statue, and he who loves his father delights to see his father's statue. It follows that he who loves the gods delights to gaze on the images of the gods and their likenesses and he feels reverence and shudders with awe of the gods who look at him from the unseen world.[3]

From Julian's defence, a few points become clear. First, images and statues are not in themselves gods, but instead point onlookers towards the gods for the purpose of reflection and, ultimately, adoration. Illustrating this movement are Julian's series of metaphors, most notable among them the notion that those who love an emperor delight in seeing the emperor's image. Adding to these points, Jamal Elias identifies several other ingredients common to pagan defences of images, namely, that as representations of gods, statues can become sources of power and, in turn, miracles. Further, pagan defences of images created a relationship between humans being made in god's image and a god being made in a human image.[4]

Pagans, and in particular those who had not converted to Christianity in light of fourth-century Roman edicts, did not just defend their use of images but had their suspicions about Christian worship as well. A pagan accusation recounted by St Symeon the Younger (521–97) stated that Christians were praying to idols when they prostrated themselves before icons.[5] Similarly, when they venerated the cross, some

pagans argued that Christians were worshiping a wooden god. According to the more scornful remarks, cross-venerating Christians may as well have been worshiping asses since it might be said that Christ sat upon a donkey during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the same way he hung upon a wooden cross.[6] In essence, the Christian preference for the cross as a symbol seemed arbitrary to pagan eyes. The subjectivity of the cross as a symbol, moreover, made it appear rather silly to pagans.

But for pagans, Christian veneration was more than just a matter of clinging to a silly or arbitrary symbol. In the pagan religious tradition of much of Graeco-Roman antiquity, one prayed before or in proximity to images or figural representations of the gods. This was surely connected to a desire to be near a god or goddess and, in turn, there arose the tendency among pagans to fuse a god with its image. In such cases, there was not merely a relationship between symbol and symbolised. Even more, the two were equated. Contrary to Emperor Julian's argument, then, a symbol and its prototype could become for many pagan religionists one and the same thing. Hence, as Moshe Barasch concludes, 'To feel close to the god when you are near to its image brings home, however vaguely and dimly, the perception that in some way they are one'.[7] As Barasch goes on to observe, this fusion may not have been given systematic formulation, but the perception, nevertheless, that a god and its image were the same thing was present in pagan thought.

If one were to dress a god or goddess, a common ritual of pagan worship in antiquity, then the fusion could be even more palpable. Of course, such a ritual may have only been meant to indicate the care one wished to bestow upon an image or representation, but it would not take much to move from caring for an image to animating it. This is made all the more plain in light of the practice in Greek and Roman religion to bathe a god. Ovid, the first-century Roman poet, describes ritually bathing Aphrodite's image in this way:

> Take off the golden necklaces from the marble neck of the goddess; take off her gauds; the goddess must be washed from top to toe. Then dry her neck and restore to it her golden necklaces; now give her other flowers, now give her the fresh-blown rose. Ye, too, she herself bids bathe under the green myrtle, and there is a certain reason for her command; learn what it is.[8]

The reasons for this ritual may have changed over time,[9] but it seems clear that worshipers treated the figural representation as if it were, in some way, living. Furthermore, as Barasch observes, 'There is only one step from draping and bathing a god's image to explicitly believing that it is indeed filled with life'.[10] It is all the more understandable, then, that when pagans saw Christians venerating the cross they concluded that they were worshiping a wooden god. When told that this was not the case, some shot back that Christians might just as well prostrate themselves before anything even remotely related to Christ.

The responses from Christians to pagan accusations varied, but authors of such responses attempted to explain their veneration of images and the cross. In doing so, they departed from the pagan notion that a god and its image were equal. This was certainly a natural move to make given the Christian roots in Judaism and the latter's scriptural views of images and worship. We will return to this Jewish context a bit further on. In the pagan context, Christian responses to accusations of idolatry appealed, in some cases, to the doctrine of the incarnation and noted that icons depicted God in his humanity as he was revealed on earth and not his divinity. Hence, they did not ascribe corporeality to that which was invisible.[11] This would surely satisfy some pagan concerns, though others still wondered about the angels that appeared in some icons. Was this not ascribing corporeality to a spiritual being? For Christians, this was not the same as depicting God in his divinity since angels were not considered to be completely incorporeal.[12]

When it came to veneration of the cross, Christian authors also appealed to its power. Demons did not tremble before asses, some wrote, but before the cross they shuddered and ran away in fear.[13] In this way, the cross, in the Christian view, was animated in its own way – it had miraculous power. Hence, there were rational explanations, such as those dependent upon the incarnation, for why Christians venerated the cross in their worship of the one God, but there were also supernatural reasons for their practice as well, for it was through the cross that Christ achieved victory over the devil. In all of this, some attempt was made to explain the practice of cross veneration. At the same time, Christian authors also attempted to mark the distinctions between pagans and Christians. Religious representations may have played a role in both religions, but it was Christian symbols that boasted special and superior power.

There were some adherents of pagan religion that did not embrace images or figural representations. Where others fused a god with its image, these adherents 'stressed the gap between the god and its image'.[14] But they went further than those like Emperor Julian who still found reason to fashion and honour images. For some, the emphasis upon a gap between a god and its corresponding image came 'close to the denial of any possibility of making an appropriate image of the god'.[15] Barasch attempts to systematise the reasons for pagan rejection of images and identifies three possible explanations. For some, it may have been the case that they rejected images of gods because they rejected the existence of gods, though this view lacks sufficient evidence. A second reason for rejecting images of gods was the belief that the gods could not be seen or that God did not have a human form. Hence, one could not depict a god, either adequately or even at all. In this case, shape and form become significant. Was the shape in which material was formed relevant to its function as a religious symbol? Bronze, for example, could be shaped into a foot basin or a human figure.[16] For some, shape was connected to function – a human form could indicate a religious symbol and therefore a shape imbued with power – but for others, since God did have a human form, shape was meaningless. As we shall see later on, this becomes particularly important for Christians thinking about the reasons why an object fashioned into the shape of a cross might be deserving of special honour. A final reason for rejecting images of gods could be for the simple reason that idol worship and the way worshipers expressed their devotion to an image was frowned upon, criticised and ridiculed. This view is frequently attested in texts from antiquity.[17]

In very similar ways, some Christians responded to the pagan accusations of cross worship practically, not by defending their use of images in worship, but by curbing their use. In this way, they put some distance between God and image. For example, in the sixth century Julian of Atramution allowed images in churches, but not those made on wood or stone. He also prohibited statues. Thus, the use of symbols was limited to such mediums as what might be sewn in curtains, for example.[18] Others found it practical that the use of religious images in worship served a catechetical function. Julian of Atramution discusses this very matter with Hypatius, archbishop of Ephesus (*c.*530), who defends the place and use of religious images as catechetical aids. For this reason, Hypatius concludes that through icons and images some might

be brought closer to God. He cites God's command for Moses to make images of cherubim for the Ark of the Covenant. In such cases as with Moses, according to Hypatius, laws restricting figural representation were eased for the sake of those who might draw nearer to God.[19] In this way, the pagan milieu provided a context for Christians to consider how, why and to what extent they incorporated images and crosses in worship.

The points that Christians chose to underline in their discussions with pagans or among each other over the topic of images and cross veneration were that through the incarnation of Christ there was theological precedent for depicting the humanity of God. In addition, the Bible provided examples, most notably with Moses and the Ark of the Covenant, of figural representation in worship. Of course, as we have seen, not all Christians promoted images and veneration in the face of pagan criticism – some curbed or restrained the use and practice – but those who did defend veneration of religious symbols argued that those like the cross boasted unique power and aided worshipers in their knowledge of God and Christian faith.

Explaining Veneration of the Cross and Images in Jewish Contexts

There were similarities between pagan and Jewish communities when it came to discussions about Christian veneration of images and the cross. In turn, a genre of literature grew up, the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, in which Christian authors addressed Jewish concerns. In texts like *The Trophies of Damascus*, so called because it is an account of Christian victories (i.e., trophies) over Jews in disputations,[20] Jews accused Christians of idolatry and of slipping back into pagan practices when they ostensibly violated God's law by worshiping images and wooden crosses.[21] Like the discussions with pagans, some Christian authors of texts in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition responded to their Jewish interlocutors by appealing to the supernatural power of the cross and images. It was through these holy objects that God demonstrated his power by miraculous signs and victory over demons. Otherwise evil people also regularly converted to Christianity through the cross of Christ. How could one not venerate the cross as a response to God's power?[22]

More frequently, and quite unlike texts engaging pagan readers, when it came to Jewish interlocutors Christian authors could appeal to

scripture, a portion of which they shared with Jews. The Old Testament's proscriptions of images are well known, most notably God's command in the Torah that neither should the Jews fashion images of any created thing, nor should they bow down and worship them (Exodus 20:4–5). Despite these sweeping rules, there were, in fact, a variety of Jewish views on the use of cultic images. For example, it seems apparent from some of Philo's (d. *c.*50) remarks on images that he did not contest them entirely, but was instead not in favour of statues painted in colour.[23] There was room, then, according to some streams of Jewish thought for certain kinds of representation; there must be room, some argued, for what else might explain God's command to construct the Ark of the Covenant, the biblical instructions to fashion cherubim for use in Jewish worship or the figures that appeared in Solomon's temple?

It was with this question in mind that Leontius, seventh-century bishop of Nicomedia in Cyprus and an author of widely used *Adversus Judaeos* arguments,[24] wrote that these seeming exemptions – the Ark of the Covenant, figures in Solomon's temple, etc. – existed because such objects were 'made [. . .] to the glory of God just as [Christians employ images in their worship of God]'.[25] Authors like Leontius referred to the variety of Jewish uses of cultic images both as a means for explaining Christian use of crosses and icons and appealing to long-standing scriptural tradition. Christians were not innovators, Leontius argued. They were simply maintaining an approach to worshiping God with a long history.[26]

Stephen of Bostra, another seventh-century Christian who wrote in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, commented that Christians employed images in their worship, and he has in mind images of saints in particular, so that they might 'glorify the One who glorified them'.[27] This assertion allows him to expand his defence of images, noting that various things made by hand were intended by God to focus worship. Such was the case with cherubim made for the Jewish tabernacle, Stephen comments, turning the matter back to his Jewish interlocutor. Did not Moses venerate these?[28]

In this way, the Old Testament was mined for material that could be used to support the veneration of images and crosses. Similarly, the Old Testament also became for these authors a sourcebook for prophecies of the cross and types of the cross. Accordingly, the cross was the 'sign' in Psalm 60:4, 86:17; Isaiah 5:26; or Ezekiel 9:4–6. In the book of

Wisdom, it was the blessed wood through which came righteousness. And in countless passages the cross was found as a type. Most notably, Christian authors ascribe the cross to the rod through which Moses split the sea (Exodus 14:16, 21; 26–7), to Moses' hands that he held out during battle with Amalek (Exodus 17:8–13) and to the pole upon which a figure of a serpent was fixed and raised in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4–9).[29] In these, as well as other similar examples, Christian authors were emphasising their point that Christian veneration of the cross was not without ancient precedent.

Many Christian authors in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition also use examples from Jewish history and the Old Testament in order to launch counterattacks against accusations of idolatry. In essence, if Jews accused Christians of idolatry in their veneration of the cross, then the Jews must also be guilty of idolatry in their use of images and objects in worship. Numerous examples of potential Jewish idolatry are found in the writings of Leontius. For example, the parents of a deceased child kept his/her garment so that they might kiss it and cry over it. Similarly, the Jews honoured the Torah and Joseph's staff. Jacob held on to Joseph's bloody coat and kissed it as a means for remembering him. Abraham bowed before others he wished to honour. Jacob blessed a pharaoh and bowed before Esau. Countless Jews bowed before their kings and the kings of other nations.[30]

In some cases, these examples are highlighted in order to demonstrate that Jews hold to these traditions as a means for honouring, not worshiping, someone. In turn, the same defence could be offered for Christian veneration of the cross. Such is the case when Leontius compares Jewish veneration of the Torah to Christian veneration of icons. 'You [venerate] the book of the Law', Leontius argues, 'but you do not [venerate] the parchments and ink but the words of God contained therein. And it is thus that I [venerate icons], for [. . .] through it I seem to hold and [venerate] Christ'.[31] So Leontius refers to the Torah as a means for illuminating Christian practice. In other instances, and this is sometimes the case when authors refer to the Ark of the Covenant and the cherubim that adorned it,[32] authors like Leontius were keen to point out to Jews that if they wished to condemn Christians for venerating the cross and images, then they must be willing to condemn God for ordering such things like the cherubim and other similar representations to be made.[33] Cases like these are used to demonstrate that the same

responses Jews might take up in order to explain their use of religious symbols could also be used by Christians in defence of their practices. But they can also be seen as a kind of counterattack meant to deflect the accusation of Christian idolatry back towards the accusers.

In other words, the strategy was simply to push back against Jewish accusations of idolatry and show them that they could be accused of the very same thing if they wished to hold to their line of argumentation. In turn, the practice of cross veneration could withstand attack. Hence, when Jews responded that images in their worship were not venerated as gods but only served to remind them of the truth they represented, Leontius was able to say, 'Well said, the same is true [for us]'.[34] At the same time, these kinds of arguments were meant to shed light upon the Christian practice of veneration even as authors like Leontius were intent to demonstrate that Christian veneration was not a new practice, but very much a part of a scriptural tradition.[35] So Christian authors appealed to Old Testament precedents in order to help Jewish interlocutors make sense of the veneration of crosses and icons.

In many cases, authors also sought to provide genuine explanations for why they venerated the cross and how it did not constitute idolatry. Authors like Leontius pointed out that Christians worship Christ, not the cross, though the latter helps remind them of what Christ did on their behalf in the crucifixion.[36] In fact, many authors claimed just as Leontius did that only when 'the two beams of the [cross] are joined together [do Christians] adore the figure because of the Christ who on the [cross] was crucified, but if the beams are separate, [we] throw them away and burn them'.[37] As another author argued, 'If any infidel wishes to prove that we worship the image of the cross, we need only separate the pieces to dissolve the image'.[38] Pieces of wood were of little value unless they were formed into the shape of the cross. At that point, mere wood became a symbol of an event that was central to Christian faith. In this way, there was a connection when it came to crosses between shape and function. The shape of the cross helped worshipers remember the events of the crucifixion. In short, it was an aid in their worship of the one God.[39]

Many authors also employed a metaphor to help them explain the symbolic function of the cross and icons. In numerous cases in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition a king or emperor functioned as the metaphor. Sometimes authors argued that the seal of the king is kissed and honoured

because it represents the king. In other cases, subjects honoured the king's crown. The point is that the object was not being worshiped, but instead the figure that the object symbolises was worshiped. So it was with icons and crosses. Christians did not worship the wood of the cross, but rather through their veneration of it, they worshiped Christ.[40]

In sum, Christians responded to the Jewish accusation of idolatry by explaining how the cross and icons functioned as aids to worship by reminding Christians of the truth represented by the cross or the image. Thus, it was not idolatry, but an act that pointed them toward the one God whom they worshiped. In order to support these claims, they deployed common metaphors, most notably a king/emperor metaphor, meant to illustrate that the honour paid to an image passed to the one symbolised in it. Christian authors also referred to numerous examples in the Old Testament where veneration was not idolatrous worship or where images were not used in idolatry. Most significant among these references was the discussion of the Ark of the Covenant and the cherubim affixed to it. Christian authors established the ancient roots of Christian veneration by appealing to these examples. They also pointed out what they argued were prophecies about and types of the cross in the Old Testament. Christian authors also drew comparisons between Christian and Jewish veneration, sometimes in order to further explain their practice and sometimes as a counterattack meant to deflect the original Jewish accusation. Finally, authors in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition defended their veneration of crosses and icons by arguing that these objects had inherent power by virtue of the fact that they were symbols of Christ. As a result, through their religious symbols Christ wrought miracles, drove away demons and converted sinners.[41] In turn, the cross was due honour from those who wished to worship Christ.

Explaining Veneration of the Cross and Images in John of Damascus' *Orations*

It is not insignificant that material from the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, passages from Leontius and Stephen of Bostra in particular, was preserved and transmitted in the eighth century in the *florilegia* of the three *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons* by John of Damascus (*c.*675–*c.*754). John, a native of Damascus who became a monk and lived near Jerusalem, began the first of his three *Orations* in the early to

mid-eighth century, perhaps even between 726 and 730.[42] Each of these treatises contains *florilegium*, a list of arguments culled from the Church Fathers and appended to the end of John's *Orations*. Each extract supported, in one way or another, John's defence of the use of Christian images and crosses in worship. As we have said, John preserved, both in the *florilegia* and in his own arguments, many of the elements used in *Adversus Judaeos* texts. But he built upon these and developed his own arguments as well.

The *Orations* are important, not necessarily because they mark one of the first attempts to systematically treat the Christian use of images. This is true in some regards, but John is hardly attempting innovative theological reflection. As we have seen, already by the seventh century discussions about Christian images and veneration had a long history.[43] John merely picks up these time-tested reflections, tunes them to a Christological key and amplifies them for a wider audience. In so doing, he is trying to confirm the orthodoxy of Christian images and veneration. What is most significant for our discussion is the place John holds in helping to mark a new context for the debate, a context that is likely much more Islamic in nature than it was Byzantine.

We will return to the nature of this new Islamic context below. It is of primary importance, however, to elucidate John's main concerns in the three *Orations*. This will not involve a full-scale analysis,[44] but an attempt to highlight the ways in which these three texts preserve and maintain the strategies other authors used to defend veneration of images and crosses in pagan and Jewish contexts and apply them to a new context. One of the important things John does in his *Orations* is to define the term 'image'. For John, an image is 'a likeness depicting an archetype, but having some difference from it; the image is not like the archetype in every way'.[45] The purpose of images is to make 'manifest and [demonstrate] something hidden'.[46] With this in mind, John specifies that there are different kinds of images. Among them are 'shapes and forms and figures [used] to convey a faint conception of God and the angels by depicting in bodily form what is invisible and bodiless, because we cannot behold the bodiless without using shapes that bear some analogy to us'.[47] This point is important and depends on how John views the incarnation of Christ as a pivotal act supporting the use of images in Christian worship. We shall return to John's thoughts on the incarnation below and note here that John also identifies images

that 'arouse the memory of past events'.[48] In particular, images recall the triumphs of brave saints and the shame of those over whom God is victorious.[49] These kinds of images are important for they function as *biblia pauperum*, or as John says, 'books for the illiterate and silent heralds of the honour of the saints, teaching those who see with a soundless voice'.[50] In essence, images functioned very much like words, John notes referring to Basil, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea, demonstrating to viewers particular kinds of Christian truth.[51]

John also defined the term 'veneration', as a 'symbol of submission and honor'.[52] He distinguished between 'veneration of worship' and 'veneration offered in honor'.[53] In John's context it was important to distinguish between the two kinds of acts. According to John, when Christians bowed down (*proskynēsis*) before images and crosses they were not worshiping them – this was reserved for God alone – but they were honouring them. One could do this as an act of worship offered to God, but so it might also be done as a way of honouring someone or something worthy of it or someone through whom 'God worked our salvation'.[54] Hence, one could venerate the saints because they were worthy of honour and they could venerate an image of Christ because it was through him that salvation came to humankind. The cross, as a symbol of this salvation, was also deserving of honour.

John also sets his discussion in the light of the incarnation of Christ and this becomes one of the primary theological bases for his defence of cross and image veneration in Christian worship. According to John, Christians worship God alone. So he maintains his monotheism in the face of suspicions of idolatry.[55] As he goes on, he insists that Christians 'venerate one God {. . .} I do not venerate the creation instead of the creator, but I venerate the Creator'.[56] Then, based upon his understanding of Christ, the Word made flesh, he claims, 'I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as he became visible for our sake, by participation in flesh and blood. I do not depict the invisible divinity, but I depict God made visible in the flesh'.[57] This kind of argument reappears throughout John's three *Orations* and each time John is keen to point out that the incarnation – from the invisible becoming visible, to Christ's birth from the Virgin and ministry on earth, to his death and resurrection – undergirds the very possibility of depicting Christ. John is equally keen to point out, furthermore, that because of the incarnation, Christians may venerate in honour, but not worship, these images and symbols as means

for recalling and contemplating God's acts on behalf of humankind.[58] In the end, John argues, it was God himself who first made images, having 'begat his Only-begotten Son and Word, his living and natural image, the exact imprint of his eternity'.[59] In these ways, the creation of images for use in Christian worship of the one God is justifiable. But veneration of images is not just made justifiable by the incarnation for John. Even more, the fact of God seen in the flesh makes John intent to preserve the practice of veneration as central to Christian faith because it is through the matter fashioned by the Creator that 'salvation was worked'.[60]

Alongside this theological defence in light of the incarnation, John also defends the use of images with the Old Testament. He uses this scripture in two ways. In the first, he mines the text for examples that suggest various kinds of veneration similar to what he wishes to defend. In this effort, similar to texts in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, John also intends to expose a contradiction in his opponents' logic. In essence, if God prohibits images and symbols, then why does he command the construction of a tabernacle, complete with carved cherubim and the Ark of the Covenant? The former were heavenly beings and the latter was an object of veneration for the Jews. Yet for John the commands against idolatry and those guiding the construction of the temple and worship do not present contradictions. He goes on to explain how they fit within the framework of monotheistic worship without constituting idolatry.[61] In fact, John repeatedly cites the Ark of the Covenant, the carved cherubim and the tabernacle.[62] He also cites the images commissioned by Solomon for use in the temple he built.[63] Each of these examples is used to demonstrate the nuances in God's view of images and symbols in worship and how the Christian view, though it departed from the Jewish view of depicting God (in light of the incarnation of Christ), remained firmly opposed to idolatry.

In the second way John uses scripture, we see him employ typological exegesis in order to show that examples in the Old Testament prefigure veneration of images and the cross. John uses the tabernacle again here and he states that God has 'established the tabernacle and everything in it and spread out in the sanctuary . . . as a type and shadow of things to come'. In this regard, he sees the Christian use of images and symbols prefigured in the tabernacle. More significant in this regard is John's frequent use of the life of Moses. John repeatedly sees the serpent that Moses fashioned and raised on a pole in the wilderness

(Numbers 21:4–9) as preparing the way for the sign of the cross as an instrument of salvation.[64] Similarly, John considers Moses producing water by striking a rock in the wilderness (Numbers 20:11) as rather curious. Surely God would not require Moses to hit the rock twice in order to work a miracle. And if producing water from a rock was up to Moses alone, then no number of blows would do the trick. John is convinced that striking the rock twice prefigures the sign of the cross and even asserts that Moses hit the rock in two motions that made the form of a cross.[65]

John's effort here is to provide scriptural support for his argument as well as to press back against those who posit that Christian worship ought to be free of any use of symbols in light of its Jewish roots. If John can demonstrate that monotheistic Jewish worship incorporated images at God's command, then he can lay claim to the same logic and shared history for Christianity. In this, Christian worship offers little innovation historically and only follows its own theology in depicting the incarnate Christ.

But if this were not enough, John also repeats a common metaphor. In all three *Orations*, John uses a king or an emperor in order to explain the use of Christian images and how this use does not constitute worship of the image. Essentially, John argues that subjects honour the image of a king (or imperial clothing) in his absence. So, the honour they give the image passes to the king himself. In this, 'everyone who honors the image clearly honors the archetype' and 'just as anyone who insults the royal image is judged as if he had done wrong against the emperor himself, so clearly anyone who insults what has been made in the image is liable to be tried for the sin'.[66]

All of these elements – his definitions of the terms 'image' and 'veneration', his theological reflection on the incarnation, his use of scripture and typological exegesis and his explanatory metaphors – allowed John to come to some conclusions about Christian images. To begin with, the use of the cross and images in Christian worship was about 'respect and veneration', not idolatrous worship.[67] This was because the honour offered to images, to use the line of thought from Basil that John so frequently uses, did not stay with the image, but passed to the archetype.[68] Thus, venerating crosses or images were means by which Christians might worship God and be 'filled with wonder and zeal' for his victorious deeds.[69] Christians cling to the practice of

veneration, moreover, because it helps them recall the means by which God wrought their salvation, achieved victory over Satan and glorified his saints.[70] Further, the practice of venerating images and the cross was grounded in the incarnation of Christ, for while it remained true that no one could depict the invisible God, they could depict 'God made visible in the flesh'. As a result, Christians were actually kept from worshiping creation and turned toward the Creator himself.[71]

In the end, God may have proscribed some images, but such declarations were, following John's argument, wisely designed to deter weak believers from the idolatry they might otherwise easily engage. The Jews were these easily tempted believers, according to John.[72] Mature believers, those without 'a diseased inclination to idolatry'[73] who 'come to be purely with God' no longer need to struggle under such restrictions.[74] Instead, they could cling to the divine power made manifest in the cross and in images created to bring glory to God.[75]

Explaining Veneration of the Cross and Images in Islamic Contexts

Prior to John of Damascus, we have seen how the topic of Christian images and cross veneration was discussed by and among Christians in a context that was still influenced by pagan religion. We have seen the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition and the contribution made to Christian defences of images and cross veneration by authors interacting with a Jewish context. And we have seen how John of Damascus preserves and extends many of the *Adversus Judaeos* arguments. But what was John's context and how does it add further shape to how veneration of images and crosses were defended?

In the second *Oration*, John mentions specifically the Byzantine emperor Leo III, who initiated the official position of iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire.[76] John mentions Leo in order to place his authority in context and criticise his meddling in ecclesiastical affairs. Patriarch Germanus I, having been deposed in 730 by Leo for supporting the use of icons in worship, is also mentioned as one of the unfortunate victims of Leo's actions.[77] With these references in mind, some scholars situate John's *Orations* in the context of Byzantine iconoclasm debates. In this way, the *Orations* become a response to other Christian communities that wished to proscribe or limit images in worship. But might John have

had a more local, pastoral concern? If so, might it be better to look closer to John's home near Jerusalem for the occasion of his writing the *Orations* instead of further afield?

Dietrich Stein thinks this is the case and argues that John wrote his *Orations* primarily for Melkite Christians who, like him, were living outside the Byzantine Empire, in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, and that the texts reflect the nature of discussions about venerating icons and crosses among Melkite Christian communities.[78] Moreover, these discussions reflect quite distinctly the Islamic milieu in which these Melkite communities existed. Before further developing the reasons why John's *Orations* reflect primarily local concerns, not matters centred in the relatively distant Byzantine Empire, we must, therefore, explore the Islamic view of images and cross veneration. Doing so will not only help us to discern John's context, but will also add greater focus to the contexts in which Christians defended their practice of veneration.

The Islamic view of images was never by any means uniform.[79] In fact, some of its earliest expressions were formed by political, not doctrinal, concerns. As the early followers of Islam expanded outside of Arabia and appropriated land for themselves they faced the two-fold task of publicly displaying Islamic hegemony – the 'symbolic appropriation of the land', according to Oleg Grabar[80] – and removing competing symbols.[81] Taken together, the task was a matter, as Sidney Griffith puts it, of 'claim[ing] the public domain for Islam in the conquered territories where hitherto the symbols of Christianity were widely exhibited'.[82] Besides giving a context in which to understand Islam's relationship to images, this purpose means that Muslims were not always opposed to images as such. They were not always iconoclastic or iconophobic, in other words, but at times were merely tearing down one symbol in favour of another. The development of a doctrinal, instead of a political, attitude towards images arose over time, a topic to which we return below.

To deal first with the symbolic assertion of Islamic hegemony: a paradigmatic symbol of this process was the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem under the auspices of the caliphs 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–707) and his son al-Walīd (r. 705–15).[83] For our purposes here, the most notable feature of the structure is its mosaic inscriptions comprised of selections from the Qur'ān. For Muslims, these phrases could function in much the same way that icons could function for

Christians: the phrases reminded Muslims of doctrines that were central to their faith. From the perspective of claiming the public space of Jerusalem for Islam, the inscriptions proclaimed the opposite of what was typically portrayed in Christian images and proclaimed by crosses. For example, inscriptions on the interior of the structure include phrases from Qur'ān 112: 'Say: He is God, the One; God the Eternal; He has neither begotten nor was He begotten; there is none comparable to him'. Another inscription, in the words of Qur'ān 17:111, proclaims, 'And say: praise be to God, Who has not taken unto Himself a son, and Who has no partner in Sovereignty, nor has He any protector on account of weakness'. The longest inscription contains cautions against the People of the Book (Christians in particular), checking their theological descriptions of God and Christ as well as asserting the Islamic view of the strict unity of God and of Christ as only one of God's messengers (from Qur'ān 4:169–171). It ends with the explicit proclamation that 'The true religion with God is Islam' and the threat that God will 'reckon' with those who do not believe in his revelations (from Qur'ān 3:16–17).[84] Inscriptions on the exterior gates are not as explicit, but are nevertheless taken from the Qur'ān and bear testimony to the true and universal religion (Islam) and the unique position of Muḥammad in proclaiming it.[85]

As Grabar points out, these inscriptions had several layers of meaning. In one sense, they had a 'missionary character'; they invited non-Muslim onlookers, especially Christians, to submit to a final revelation that incorporated, even as it corrected, elements of their own faith. In another sense, the inscriptions also proclaimed the superiority of the new faith and the political entity based upon it that was now in charge.[86] This, in turn, not only made a statement to non-Muslims about the appropriation of public space by Islam. It was also a clear reminder to any Muslims viewing the competing symbols of Christianity that it was Islam that now held sway over other religions. In this way, the Dome of the Rock could be seen to rival not only Christian doctrine in general, but even the nearby Church of the Holy Sepulchre in particular. The structure and its inscriptions claimed this public space for Islam.[87]

The Dome of the Rock is but one example of the ways expanding Muslim communities asserted their rule over subjected, non-Muslim communities and claimed public spaces for Islam. Another example can be seen in the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. The structure, completed

under al-Walīd, essentially absorbs the Church of St John the Baptist that once laid claim to the site. As with the Dome of the Rock, the mosque in Damascus asserted the dominance of Islam and 'put the previously high public profile of Christianity into a permanent eclipse'.[88] Add to these structural examples the issue of new coinage that proclaimed the truths of Islam and the authority of the Muslim caliph where once crosses and Greek inscriptions proclaimed a different message.[89] Even signposts alongside roads began to appear in Arabic and included, not the cross as a symbol, but the *shahādah*, the Islamic creed bearing witness to the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muḥammad.[90] There were constant reminders, then, that Muslims and Islam controlled the public spaces of cities like Jerusalem and Damascus and other areas that fell under Muslim control.

This brings us to the task Muslims faced of removing competing symbols. If Muslims sought to make Islam public as an assertion of power, then they also had to dismantle the competing, public nature of those they conquered.[91] Most notably for our study, these competing symbols took the form of Christian icons, images and crosses. An important element to see here is that symbols did not merely represent things, but publicly proclaimed certain kinds of identities and demarcated the boundaries within which the hegemony represented by a symbol predominated. So, one way of facing a competing symbol was to subordinate it. Such might be the case of the Dome of the Rock's position vis-à-vis the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. But more explicit efforts would mean simply removing competing symbols. It should be noted that there were not consistent policies of removing competing symbols that were applied uniformly or across multiple regions. Instead, policies governing the removal of competing religious and/or political symbols were not always utilised and, when they were, would be applied differently at different times. With this clarification in mind, we read reports of 'Abd al-Malik's policy to knock down, remove, or efface publicly displayed crosses in areas under his rule. In other accounts, the general Muslim antipathy for symbols like the cross is evident and, in turn, their subsequent removal from public spaces and the prohibition of their display on Christian feast days. The efforts of rulers like 'Abd al-Malik, though they varied in specificity according to time and region, were part of a long-standing strategy available to Muslims that could help to control the public nature of Christianity.[92]

This 'dismantling of public Christianity', as Sidney Griffith calls it, did not always remain in the public sphere.[93] Neither did it necessarily stay focused on crosses. It could reach into private spheres such as churches and fall upon Christian images as well. Notable in this regard is the caliph Yazid II (r. 720–4) and an edict he issued towards the end of his reign.[94] According to one account, 'Yazid [. . .] gave orders to tear to pieces and break up the paintings and statues of everything which lives and moves, from temples and buildings, from walls, from beams and stones; even those that were found in books were torn out'.[95] Yazid's focus on images of things that live and move is significant and a topic to which we will turn in our consideration of doctrinal developments in Muslims' religious discomforts with images. For now, it is important to see that the Islamic antipathy that could be shown towards Christian symbols was not always limited to the cross and neither was it always restricted to public, non-confessional spaces. In fact, there is even archaeological evidence from damaged mosaics on church floors in Syria and Palestine dating from the eighth century. Often the damage consists of deliberate defacement to human beings and animals. The deliberate nature of the damage suggests that it may have been done in response to Yazid's decree.

Further evidence from floor mosaics in churches in Jordan reveals similar damage where *tesserae* (tiles used to make mosaic images or designs) were deliberately altered and replaced in order to modify images. For example, a mosaic of a human face could be carefully disfigured so that the offensive elements were removed but the remaining portions of the mosaic and inscriptions were left undamaged. Robert Schick's work in this area suggests that this kind of damage and mosaic re-rendering was done, not by Muslims, but by Christian hands in response to abuse meted out by Muslims that included accusations of idolatry and enforcement of Islamic bans upon images.[96] In short, Christians may have carefully altered their own images in order to avoid Muslim reaction.

Once again, it should be understood that Muslim restrictions upon or actions taken against images and crosses were not always applied consistently or even rigorously.[97] Nevertheless, it seems clear that even if some Muslims periodically and actively removed or damaged problematic images, so, too, were Christians involved in redressing their own iconography. In this light, written responses defending or

explaining the use of Christian symbols could as much reflect intra-Christian discussions as they could Christian–Muslim disputations. A text could be responding to Muslim accusations, but so it might also be addressing Christian concerns such as the importance of devotion to images and crosses.

As we have noted, there were political reasons for removing the cross from public display. Significantly, however, the cross was also the symbol of Christian religious belief. It denoted the Christian view of Christ alongside his death on the cross and subsequent resurrection. Such views ran against Islamic theology and so it was in a religious sense, too, that Muslims at times registered their theological discomfort with the cross as a symbol. This Muslim antagonism applied not only to public display of crosses, but as we have already seen, to the ostensibly idolatrous Christian practice of venerating crosses as well. This was particularly the case since venerating crosses often meant bowing down to them. The act of bowing took on special meaning in religious contexts and Muslims spent much time reflecting on the proper meaning and function of this kind of bowing (*al-sujūd*).[98] Prior to Islam, the act of prostration, for Christians and Jews, was a significant religious gesture. Christians prostrated themselves before crosses, icons and even those in authority. Perhaps in light of their encounters with Christians, Muslims came to see the religious act of prostration as a point of contention, not only with non-Muslims, but also within their own communities.[99] For many Muslims, though, the act of prostration was a gesture to be offered to God alone (though there is mention of prostration to others and even objects like the Ka'bah in the Qur'ān and Muslim traditions).[100] As a result, it was not just the display of Christian symbols that was scandalous to Muslims, but also the gesture of religious prostration in public Christian worship.[101] In turn, the cross was not only a political symbol that Muslims sought to dismantle but was also a religious symbol around which Christians and Muslims debated the topic of idolatry as well as Christological concerns.[102]

Muslims also developed broader bases upon which to object to images.[103] Most important for our purposes here is the Muslim theological recognition that God alone is 'the Creator [...] the Fashioner' (*al-khāliqu* [...] *al-muṣawwiru*; Qur'ān 59:24). Hence, the one who fashions an image is in some ways acting like God. Similarly, in one of the traditions of Muḥammad, the Prophet is said to have objected

to images on the grounds that angels would not visit a home containing pictures. He also said that those who might fashion images of created things would be punished on the day of resurrection and asked to blow the spirit of life into the images they created.[104] In other words, those who sought to symbolise life were essentially mimicking the Creator.[105] This tradition adds some context to the report quoted above concerning Yazid's edict that proscribed certain kinds of images (of things that lived and moved), but it also frames the theological view through which many Muslims looked upon images. In this light, Christian images in particular were an affront to the Qur'ānic notion of God as sole creator and the prophetic traditions that supported this doctrine. Further, the cross and images such as those that depicted Christ crucified upset the essential doctrines of Islam. To parade this kind of idolatry in public, as might literally occur during public processions of the cross, was, in the end, not just a political display that overstepped the boundaries of public space that Islam had claimed for itself, but it was a doctrinal trespass as well.[106] As Griffith concludes, beyond the creation or existence of Christian symbols like the cross, '[i]n Muslims' eyes the veneration of the cross is a public repudiation of the God who sent down the Qur'ān. This conviction was behind the Islamic campaign in Umayyad times especially to remove the public display of idolatry and to attack the Christians for religious misbehavior'.[107] So it was both the presence of the symbols like the cross and the Christian posture towards them that was problematic for Muslims. Their response, at times, was to dismantle these symbols, to demand that Christians account for them or to accuse Christians of idolatry.

Now to return to John of Damascus and his three *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons*. Were these treatises a response to the policies of Leo III, whom John mentions in the *Orations*, or was he writing in response to local concerns affecting Melkite Christian communities in his own vicinity? John did not make the identity of his audience explicit, but the fact remains that the primary concerns he addressed – the proper function of images and crosses in the context of monotheistic worship in addition to the support devotion to images and crosses had from biblical, theological and historical sources – were present in his local context. In like manner, his concerns were common features among other texts written by Christians in Islamic milieus. This point becomes most clear in light of analyses brought to bear on these texts in Chapters 2, 3 and 4,

especially with texts contemporaneous to John,[108] but it can also be pointed out here that opposition to the public display of Christian symbols from Muslims and the various efforts to assert the public image of Islam were processes well under way by John's time.[109] Hence, when John wrote that, 'the word of a king exercises terror over his subjects. For there are few who would utterly neglect the royal constitutions established from above [. . .] and as such the laws of the kings hold sway',[110] might he be referring to the caliph who ruled over the area where he and other Melkite Christian communities existed? Griffith presses this suggestion further, noting John's lament, 'it seems to me a calamity [. . .] that the Church, adorned with such privileges and arrayed with traditions received from above by the most godly men, should return to the poor elements, afraid where no fear was, and, as if it did not know the true God, be suspicious of the snare of idolatry'.[111] For Griffith, this lament described quite well an Islamic context with its estimation of Christian devotion of images and crosses as idolatry. Further, John's assertion, that the Christian depiction of an invisible God conforms to the doctrine of the incarnation and the monotheistic worship of a Trinity in Unity, reflects quite clearly some of the main theological lines dividing Christianity and Islam. Finally, the fact that John went on to link veneration of icons with other concerns that were topoi of Christian–Muslim apologetic literature – for example, honouring saints, Christian baptism, the Eucharist, the Christian practice of facing east in prayer and cross veneration – situates the *Orations* quite comfortably in a context related to Islam.[112] As Griffith concludes, then, 'it seems inconceivable that John of Damascus would be primarily concerned with imperial policies in far-off Constantinople and inattentive to the very real pressures exerted on the Christian community in his own milieu'.[113]

With this in mind, there is no need to look as far as the Byzantine Empire for an occasion for John's treatises; an occasion is readily present quite close to John's home. Many Melkite Christians reading John's *Orations* would not be troubled by the doctrines depicted in icons or symbolised in the cross. Many could have been troubled, however, by their devotion to icons and cross veneration in light of a context that challenged the presence of such symbols and attributed veneration of them to idolatry. For this reason, a defence of making and venerating icons and crosses, the focus of John's work, was most important.

This would only become increasingly important as devotion to images and crosses waned in light of Muslim and Jewish resistance to veneration of such symbols. John's *Orations*, like other texts written in Islamic milieus that responded to anxieties over images, met these concerns by defending the practice and function of veneration.

Though an Islamic context may be the most resounding note heard in the *Orations*, echoes of other contexts remain. As we have already seen, John refers in his second *Oration* to Leo and Patriarch Germanus. And the main thrust of this second *Oration* seems to constitute an attempt to defuse the creeping effects of Byzantine iconoclastic policies. But even this must be understood in light of Melkite Christian communities' positions vis-à-vis their Muslim rulers. Accordingly, in addition to local Muslim resistance of icon and cross veneration, the spreading news of Leo's actions against icons may have only given Melkite Christians further reason to abandon their devotion to venerating images. Leo's iconoclasm would have been especially welcome among Melkite Christians already expressing iconophobic leanings. Thus, John's *Orations* would remind such Melkite Christians of the importance of icons and crosses in Christian worship. Further, as Griffith notes, it is in John's second *Oration* where he pays particular attention to defending cross veneration and linking the practice to icon veneration. For him, both acts were part of the tradition handed down by the Church. In Byzantine contexts, cross veneration was often favoured and promoted in place of icons.[114] John's readers, already under Muslim pressure to forgo their devotion to images, may have been tempted to adhere to a similar arrangement. John's texts would have encouraged them to remain devoted to both images and crosses in the face of local Muslim resistance and the news of Byzantine policies.[115] What this means is that John used his *Orations* to speak to local concerns, whether they were being felt from nearby Muslims or shaped by the news of policies further away.

Returning to Abū Qurrah with whom this chapter began, one can see that a local occasion for John's three *Orations* is reflected in *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*. Most importantly, one can clearly discern in Abū Qurrah's text the move discussions of images and cross veneration had made to a new, Islamic context. Abū Qurrah makes his Islamic context reasonably apparent. Though his text is unique, it is interesting in light of John of Damascus because it clearly draws from

the latter's three *Orations*. This is a fair conclusion given the content of the two texts and the fact that both authors were monks, Abū Qurrah a bit later than John, of the Mar Sabas monastery in the desert of Judea. It will be recalled that, in Abū Qurrah's text, he recounts a dilemma facing the Christian community of Edessa: should they relent in the face of Muslim taunts and abandon their devotion to the icon of Christ crucified? Abū Qurrah urges his readers to maintain their devotion and provides a defence of venerating icons and crosses. He follows John's *Orations* closely, repeating many of the same strategies and metaphors (that John in turn drew from earlier texts). But Abū Qurrah also engages Islamic doctrine explicitly. For example, Abū Qurrah addresses the Islamic notion that making images of things that move and breathe was an action that mimicked God as sole creator. In doing so, he refers to an Islamic tradition that reports a saying of Ibn 'Abbās, one of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. According to this tradition, a man came to Ibn 'Abbās and told him that he made his livelihood by making images. When Ibn 'Abbās told him what the Prophet had said concerning images (that God would reckon with those who made them), the man was afraid. Ibn 'Abbās consoled the man, saying, 'If you insist on doing it, available to you are the plants, or anything in which there is no spirit'.[116] For Abū Qurrah, allowing floral decoration but not images of other living things was a contradiction and he turns the matter back on Muslims. 'They are unmasked', he exclaims, 'who mock the Christians for putting icons of Christ and their saints in churches, and for making prostration to people'. How can Muslims accuse Christians of idolatrous prostration, in other words, when they themselves adorn their places of worship with images of living things?[117]

This same counterattack strategy appears later on in Abū Qurrah's treatise when he attempts to defend the Christian practice of touching or kissing icons. For Abū Qurrah, such devotion was offered not to the image itself, but to the one represented by the image. With this in mind, he refers to Muslim prayer. 'Tell us', he writes, 'do you [Muslims] make the act of prostration only to the thing on which you put your knees and forehead, or to what your intention wills in putting down your knees and forehead in the act of making a bow?'[118] Again, Abū Qurrah finds a correlative between Christian and Muslim practice that exposes a contradiction. If Muslims are going to make accusations about how Christians venerate icons, then they must be

prepared to answer for similar behaviour that is evident in their religious practice.[119]

In all of this, Abū Qurrah has taken up many of the arguments of John's three *Orations* and put them to work in what is most certainly an Islamic context. Abū Qurrah also deploys a strategy with a long tradition: finding correlative practices in his opponents' religion and using them to both explain Christian practices and turn his opponents' attacks back on them. And like other Christians who promoted the use of images, he encourages Christians in Edessa to remain steadfast in their devotion to icons and the cross, noting that the opposition they may face as a result only indicates the success of the doctrines their images publicly proclaim.[120] Thus, Abū Qurrah's treatise not only demonstrates the transition to Islamic contexts that discussions of images had to make, but that the arguments used to defend and encourage devotion to images and crosses were often very similar to those written in different and even earlier contexts. As we shall see, many of the strategies deployed by Christian authors in these contexts – among pagans in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, among Jews in the seventh century and in Islamic milieus beginning in the eighth century – will be picked up by authors from various Christian traditions who were living under Muslim rule.

Conclusion

Now we must draw together these many threads. This chapter is by no means an exhaustive treatment of religious images as they are discussed in pagan, Jewish, Christian or Muslim sources. Instead, the chapter's central concern is to ensure that readers have these religious and historical contexts in view as part of the background of texts Christians devoted to defending their religious practices. One cannot understand the arguments Christians used in Islamic milieus without first understanding how many of these arguments developed in pagan and Jewish contexts and with John of Damascus, whose work on the matter is best situated in an Islamic context.

To put the matter another way, this chapter attempts to demonstrate why it was that Muslims were troubled by Christian images in general and why the Christian practice of venerating the cross was particularly scandalous for them. From a political perspective, the cross represented a

foreign, and in some cases subdued, entity. As such, Muslims often felt it was necessary to put the symbol in its proper place. From a religious perspective, the presence of icons and other kinds of images and symbols in Christian worship was a theological affront to Islamic doctrine. This was particularly the case with the cross. Beyond the political symbol it had become, the cross also represented one of the main doctrinal distinctions between Muslims and Christians and bowing before crosses seemed to Muslims to be tantamount to idolatry.

For these reasons, some Muslims attacked Christian images and crosses as symbols of idolatry and asked Christians to make an account for them as a part of their alleged monotheistic worship. While icons do appear consistently in Christian apologetics, especially in the eighth and ninth centuries, it was cross veneration in particular that drew Muslim ire, becoming a stumbling block and point of contention. As such it appears more frequently and receives more sustained treatment in the literature. This likely had something to do with the widespread nature of the cross as a religious *and* political symbol from the fourth century onwards.[121]

Alongside defending the practice of veneration in light of Muslim attacks, many Christian communities existed in contexts where they faced pressures of various kinds to curb their devotion to religious images or the cross, at times abandoning one or the other or even both altogether. In a context where symbols marked both political and religious boundaries, the devotion one paid to a symbol could mean something for his or her devotion to Christian faith. Even for those who felt cross veneration might be of marginal importance to Christian faith, especially since it could be cause for mockery and mistreatment, defences of cross veneration would pull the practice back to the centre of theological importance. Thus, some Christian authors wrote texts in response to these matters, defending their position to Muslims and encouraging their Christian communities to maintain their devotion. Why such authors were keen to defend cross veneration to Muslims or to establish the importance of devotion to the cross for Christians are questions to which the rest of the book is devoted.

This chapter also attempts to situate Christian–Muslim discussions of cross veneration within a much broader context. It should be clear by now that when Christians took up a defence of their veneration of the cross before Muslims, they had a long and venerable tradition to which

they could refer.[122] Just as Theodore Abū Qurrah took up arguments from John of Damascus who, in turn, culled material from the Church Fathers and *Adversus Judaeos* texts, so later Christians would take similar material and strategies in their efforts to defend Christian veneration of crosses. And so the appearance of various kinds of counterattacks, the use of the Old Testament in order to establish ancient precedence and explanations for veneration shaped by theology (the incarnation, the salvific power wrought by the cross) and reason (king metaphors) become stock strategies. In this light, the historical contexts in this chapter – pagan views of Christian symbols, the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition and Jewish context and the Islamic view of Christian images and crosses – help to inform the texts examined in the rest of this book. It will become clear in the pages that follow how much of the material examined in this chapter reappears in different milieus and in later periods, sometimes almost verbatim while at other times reshaped and given new life in order to fit new contexts.

CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS DEFLECTING ACCUSATIONS OF IDOLATRY

In their responses to the accusation that they worship the cross of Christ, many Christian authors refer in some way to Muslim veneration of the Black Stone (*al-Ḥajar al-Aswad*). This stone is built into a corner of the Ka'bah, the large cube-shaped structure near the centre of the Sacred Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*) in Mecca. There, Muslims gather annually for the pilgrimage (*Ḥajj*) and circumambulate the Ka'bah seven times, touching the Black Stone or at least gesturing towards it.[1] This becomes important for many of the Christian authors we will look at in this chapter, for they sought to make connections between how Christians venerated the cross and how Muslims venerated the Black Stone.[2] For many authors, there are similarities that helped to elucidate the place and function of such piety.

With this in mind, many of the authors examined in this chapter add a polemical edge to their comparisons between the cross and the Black Stone. Connections between Christian veneration and Muslim veneration are not merely drawn by the authors. Even more, the connections are used to denigrate the other's religion and make it appear idolatrous or, at the very least, to look as though it had been built on foundations of paganism. Often these discussions take the form of a rhetorical exchange (though at times these exchanges took place in the context of actual debate or in epistolary exchanges). For example, an author might acknowledge the Muslim accusation that Christians worship the cross, but then deflect this accusation by launching a

counterattack, the purpose of which was to expose the allegedly pagan foundations of Muslim piety. In some texts, Muslims are accused of nascent idolatry in their veneration of the Black Stone. In other works, this accusation seems to be limited to a subtle suggestion. Muslims were equally skilled in deploying this tactic. If Christians were keen to attack the historicity of Islam and the Prophet, then they would be happy to expose what they saw as Christianity's brittle foundations and history of religious manipulation. Both Christian and Muslim authors, then, deflect accusations and attempt to hurl them back at their opponents.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine these accusations as one strategy for defending cross veneration. Having done so, we can then consider how the authors' counterattacks put cross veneration to use as a means for navigation – how it assisted readers in making sense of their multi-religious environments – and identification – how it helped to define the identities of religious communities vis-à-vis the others around them.

John of Damascus on the Counterattack

'[Muslims] also defame us as being idolaters because we venerate the cross, which they despise'.[3] So writes John of Damascus in the middle of the eighth century in 'De haeresibus' ('On Heresies'),[4] a text he devotes to Christian heresies. Islam – conceived of in his text as the latest in a long line of Christian heresies – was left to chapter 100 at the end of the treatise. John begins by describing Islam as 'the superstition of the Ishmaelites', and the 'fore-runner of the Antichrist'.[5] He also highlights some of its distinguishing features. Some of these John describes with helpful accuracy, such as Islam's emphasis upon divine oneness, the Qur'ānic conception of Christ as the 'Word of God, and his spirit',[6] or the Qur'ānic denial of Christ's death and divinity.[7] Some of these details are given without comment. In other places, however, John considers them 'absurdities worthy of laughter'.[8]

John also attaches rebuttals to much of the information about Islam that he disclosed. In other words, he shared a detail about Islam and then responded to it. These responses are introduced with phrases like 'we ask', 'we say' or 'and we respond'. So, when John writes that Muslims believe the Qur'ān was revealed (*katenechthēnai*) to them by God, he responds, 'And we ask: "And which is the one who gives witness, that

God has given to him the scriptures?"'[9] What follows in each case was a kind of apologetic guide, a dialogical playbook for readers to follow, showing them the Muslim proposition, a Christian rebuttal, the Muslim response and further Christian argument. What John offers, then, is a Christian understanding of Islam with Christian responses to theological challenges presented by Muslims.

It is in this light that John acknowledges the Muslim accusation that veneration of the cross was idolatrous and scornful. After his brief summary of the accusation he offers a defence. But in his defence John does not explain the function of venerating the cross in the context of Christian worship. Neither does he defend the reasons for why Christians did it. Instead, John resorts to a counterattack.[10] He reverses the accusation of idolatry and fires it back at Muslims. He writes:

> [A]nd we respond to them: 'How is it that you [Muslims] rub (*prostribesthe*) yourselves against a stone by your [*Chabathan*], and you express your adoration (*phileite*) to the stone by kissing it?' And some of them answer that [because] Abraham had intercourse with Hagar on it; others, because he tied the camel around it when he was about to sacrifice Isaac. And we respond to them: 'Since the Scripture says that there was a grove-like mountain and wood, from which Abraham even cut for the holocaust on which he laid Isaac, and also that he left the asses behind with the servants, from where is, then, your idle tale? For, in that place, there is neither wood from a forest, nor do asses travel through'. And they are embarrassed. However they claim that the stone is of Abraham. Then we respond: 'Suppose that it is of Abraham, as you foolishly maintain; are you not ashamed to kiss it for the only reason that Abraham had intercourse with a woman, or because he tied his camel to it, and yet you blame us for venerating the cross of Christ, through which the power of the demons and the deceit of the devil have been destroyed?' This, then, which they call 'stone' is the head of Aphrodite, whom they used to venerate (and) whom they called [*Chaber*], on which those who can understand it exactly can see, even until now, traces of an engraving.[11]

With the Muslim accusation of idolatry, then, comes a similar accusation from John. With this counterattack, John refers to the Black Stone of the

Ka'bah and sets out to expose what he alleges are its muddled and idolatrous origins. Accordingly, in his first response, John reveals that Muslims must be confused when they connect the Black Stone to the sacrifice of Abraham's son. The stone resides in an Arabian desert where trees do not grow and donkeys do not travel. Yet the scriptures, John points out referring to the Old Testament account (Genesis 22:1–19), claim that the sacrifice took place near a forest. For John, Muslims are clearly mistaken.

John follows this counterattack with a second one and argues that the stone Muslims venerate is the very essence of paganism. It is the head of Aphrodite, the goddess that pre-Islamic Arabs used to worship and was given the Arabic name *Chaber*. Here, John may confuse what he thinks is the name of a divinity with the Arabic phrase *Allāhu akbar* ('God is greatest') or he may be making a connection between Muslim worship of Allāh and the pre-Islamic worship of a god called Akbar. Some scholars find these suggestions doubtful and prefer to think that John's use of *Chaber* is connected to the Arabic root *k-b-r* ('to be great'). If this is the case, then *Chaber* may refer to 'al-Kubrā', a possible reference to the cult of Aphrodite.[12] Whatever John may have in mind with his use of *Chaber*, it seems clear that his intention is to undercut Islam's claim to pure monotheism. In his mind, Islam has pagan roots regardless of whatever it has grown to be or however it has developed. Muslims may not realise it, but the stone they venerate is, in John's account, an idol.

It may be helpful at this point to consider some Islamic sources for the development of the Ka'bah. In fact, information about the Ka'bah in Islamic authoritative sources is not extensive. It is referred to in the Qur'ān as the 'Sacred House' (5:97) and the 'ancient House' (22:29, 33). Along with his son, Ishmael (*Ismā'īl*), Abraham built the Ka'bah as a sanctuary (2:125, 127). This is as much as the Qur'ān reveals. Islamic traditions with varying degrees of authority help to clarify and fill in the gaps left by the Qur'ānic narrative. According to a number of these, Abraham is commanded by God to build the Ka'bah and, in some versions, Ishmael assists in its construction.[13] According to one authoritative account, completion of the Ka'bah depends on one final stone. Abraham sends Ishmael to look for a suitable one, but when he returns, Ishmael sees Abraham fixing the Black Stone in place. The angel Gabriel is the one that miraculously provides the stone from heaven.[14] In another account, the Black Stone is originally white and is brought

by Gabriel from India. The stone becomes black due to human sin, fire damage (in turn attributed to human sin for preparing fires near the Ka'bah) or menstruating women, the implication in each case being that its blackness is the result of pre-Islamic impurity.[15]

Of greatest concern in these traditions is the establishment of supernatural sanctity for both the Ka'bah and the Black Stone. John offers a mysterious reference to Hagar, but in fact only a little space is given to the history of Ishmael or Hagar in Islamic sources.[16] While they are given greater focus elsewhere in the Islamic traditions, their function there also helps to support the establishment of Islamic rituals centred in Mecca. As for the sacrifice of Abraham's son, also mentioned by John, the Qur'ān does not mention the boy by name. As a result, two schools of thought emerge in early Islam, one supporting Isaac as the sacrifice and one supporting Ishmael. It is not until the tenth century that preference among Islamic exegetes is given to Ishmael as the intended sacrifice.[17]

With these Islamic sources in mind, what seems clear is that John has introduced, confusedly or otherwise, some of his own details to the story.[18] His intention must surely have been to confirm in his readers' minds the pagan and idolatrous origins of Islamic piety, Muslims' veneration of the Black Stone in particular. In John's account, then, Muḥammad (*Mamed*) emerges as a prophet leading the Arabs beyond their pagan forebears to monotheism. But he stopped short of pure religion. Thus, while it is true that pagan worship, including the worship of Aphrodite, was a part of pre-Islamic life in Arabia and that the Prophet's message was one of monotheism,[19] Muḥammad nevertheless confused, in John's account, true worship of God.[20] As a result, Muḥammad is branded as a false prophet who preached a heresy of rituals with pagan roots. '[A]nd yet', John almost mocks, '[Muslims] blame us for venerating the cross of Christ . . .?'[21] In other words, on what basis might Muslims accuse Christians of idolatry when an object central to their piety was, formerly at least, an idol? The result of the Muslim accusation, once in John's hands, should not be Christian shame for venerating the cross, but Muslim embarrassment (*Aidountai men*) for their nascent idolatry.[22]

In this counterattack, John provides his readers with a very tidy comparison. On the one hand, there is the Muslims' veneration of what he argues was formerly an idol. On the other hand, there is the veneration of the cross that, as John adds, carries with it the power to

subjugate demons and destroy the deceit of the devil.[23] We will return to the relationship of power and the cross in Chapter 3, but not before noting here that John's comparison raises the cross above both Satan and his deceits. 'Deceits', moreover, is surely meant by John as a synonym for Islam and the 'idle tales' invented by its prophet, Muḥammad.[24] In contrast, the power of the cross might remind John's readers of Christianity's veracity.

The effect of John's reminder could be threefold. It surely suggested to readers of John's text that they should distance themselves from any influence that a religion with pagan roots might have over them. In the same way, it would protect Christian communities in Islamic milieus from converting to what John had exposed as an inferior faith. And it gave Christian readers ammunition to fire at Muslims should they become engaged in debate. In other words, John used his comparison of cross veneration with Muslim veneration of the Black Stone to help his readers navigate their multi-religious environment. By reading his text, they would know to what they ought to draw near and from what they might best keep their distance.

Beyond navigation, John's counterattack upon Muslim veneration of the Black Stone also helped to define the religious identity of the Christians who read his text. According to John's argument, in a context where religions influenced one another and their followers, Christians were the ones who venerated the cross, a practice that put the accent on the purity of their faith. This was so because Muslims, regardless of their claims to monotheism, venerated an object with pagan and idolatrous roots.

That John's counterattack functioned in this way further helps to demonstrate why he was apparently unconcerned to *explain* cross veneration and respond directly to the Muslim defamation of Christians as idolaters. For in truth, what purpose might such an explanation serve if his readers were unlikely to be Muslims? If, however, his primary readers were fellow Christians living in an increasingly Islamic milieu, then they might very well require some reassurance of Christian superiority and an exposition of the pagan roots of Islam. As a result, Christians might be more certain to avoid Islam as the dangerous heresy that John said it was. Thus, by drawing Christianity and Islam together in a comparison of veneration, John was effectively able to expose Islam as the idolatrous image seen in the inverted reflection of the sacred cross.

And the image – identity, really – of Christians as the ones who worshiped in truth, even though John does not explicitly articulate this, was clarified as a result of his attack upon Islam.

Muslims on the Counterattack

Christian authors were not the only ones who tried to repay accusations of idolatry with counterattacks. Muslims used this same ploy with equal precision in their attempts to expose Christianity's alleged pagan and manufactured foundations. Two examples will suffice and help to underline the purpose of counterattacks and deflecting accusations of idolatry. In the first example, 'Abd al-Jabbār wrote in 995 a text called the *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuuwa* (*Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood*) in an effort to substantiate the authenticity of Muḥammad's claims to prophethood (claims that were continually under attack by Jewish and Christian authors). In this work he devoted a lengthy section to the 'Critique of Christian Origins'. Christian doctrine, use of scripture, Christian practice and piety and the history of Christianity were all under attack in 'Abd al-Jabbār's critique. In essence, buttressing Muḥammad's claims to authentic prophethood meant weakening the claims of opponents. Thus, Christianity came under sustained attack in his text.

Of particular interest here are 'Abd al-Jabbār's attempts to demonstrate how early Christians falsified Jesus' message. For 'Abd al-Jabbār, these early followers of Jesus deliberately mishandled what was originally an Islamic message. The result of their mishandling became the tainted religion of Christianity. For example, 'It was a practice of the Romans', 'Abd al-Jabbār claims, 'to put crescents, and things like the crescent, on their banners, seeking the blessing of the moon and the planets [. . .] {Christians} took them down and put crosses in their place. Thus they remain to the present day'.[25] 'Abd al-Jabbār continues, 'Then {Constantine} began arranging to move the Romans away from venerating the planets to venerating crosses'.[26]

In other words, Christian veneration of the cross was merely a Constantinian replacement for Roman veneration of the moon and planets. In turn, venerating the cross of Christ could be seen as a practice with thoroughly polytheistic roots, or at least a rather dubious attempt to replace pagan practices. For John of Damascus, Muḥammad's heresy was, however slight, a move beyond paganism. For 'Abd al-Jabbār, however,

replacing the moon and planets with the cross was not seen as a progression towards monotheism:

> [Constantine] made an external show of venerating (*ta'ṭīma*) Christ and the Cross. Yet he confirmed the Roman religious practices as they were [...] He removed nothing other than the worship (*'ibādah*) of the planets, and he added nothing other than the veneration (*ta'ṭīma*) of Christ, espousal of his divinity, and veneration (*wa-ta'ṭīma*) of the Cross. Yet this was not unfamiliar to the Romans. For one who believes that the planets (which are inorganic, dead things) are lords that bring benefit and harm is not unlike one who says that a person (who is not only living, sensible, and discerning but is also said to have brought the dead to life) is a god who created planets with his Father and Spirit.[27]

Essentially, Constantine's Christianity was paganism with a slight twist. Everything pertaining to Roman paganism remained except for the veneration of the cross and a divine Christ. These two minor changes, moreover, were not a difficult leap for Constantine's followers to make. As 'Abd al-Jabbār claims, if, as in Roman practices, dead matter can affect change in the world, then how difficult would it be to imagine that a living person (Jesus) might be capable of even more?

'Abd al-Jabbār went further. According to his argument, Constantine was 'a wicked, calculating man, who patiently scrutinised matters'.[28] Unlike Muḥammad in John of Damascus' account who stumbled into heresy, Constantine deliberately altered elements of Roman paganism and married them to elements of Christian faith. Temples became churches that were intentionally filled, under Constantine's patronage, with ignorant followers. He changed only very little of Roman practices, a move made all the more easy by unquestioning and unthinking adherents. Anyone who did not follow suit suffered.[29] In fact, the threat of death was so real that followers of Constantine's Christianity 'took up venerating the Cross [...] and following the religious practices of the Romans', sometimes only outwardly, but entirely out of fear or ignorance.[30] Constantine continued to rule and manipulate, 'busy killing those who did not venerate the Cross and declare that Christ was Lord until [Christianity] became entrenched and empowered'.[31]

Thus, according to 'Abd al-Jabbār, Christianity departed from Christ's original message under Constantine's power. The religion lacked intelligent and courageous followers who might question and resist a calculating Constantine. Of course, it was not uncommon in medieval apologetic texts intent on discerning or demonstrating the true and superior religion to categorise followers of another religion as having converted out of ignorance, greed or having been violently coerced into conversion.[32] 'Abd al-Jabbār deploys this same strategy of categorisation in his text by suggesting that Christians entered their faith either out of fear or ignorance. Furthermore, veneration of the cross seems to be one of the special identifiers of these followers and, in essence, was one of the marks of a contrived religion that was perpetuated by Constantine until it was satisfactorily embedded in society. In the end, an attack upon the prophethood of Muḥammad gives way in 'Abd al-Jabbār's text to a counterattack that sought to expose Christianity's allegedly pagan roots.

A similar counterattack comes in our second Muslim example from the scholar Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī. In 1321 he responded to a Christian letter from Cyprus.[33] In the Christian letter, the author affirms aspects of Islam (e.g., it was a genuine message sent to the Arabs), but sees in the religion only a confirmation of Christian truth. In al-Dimashqī's lengthy and biting response, he refutes the provocative treatise, attacking Christian scripture and the history of Christianity's formation.[34] Like al-Jabbār, al-Dimashqī attributed the rise and spread of Christianity to Constantine. In al-Dimashqī's version, Constantine emerges and, having had a dream about 'angels, signs and crosses' that would repel enemies, he inquires about the cross. He is told about the Christians and their 'exaltation of the cross'. This 'aroused in [him] a desire to make the Christian religion known'. On this basis, Christian doctrine and methods of scriptural interpretation developed and spread.[35]

There is some semblance of truth to al-Dimashqī's account – Christianity did gain wider acceptance with Constantine's vision of the cross and subsequent conversion – but other details are meant to tear at Christianity's foundations and expose them as contrived. Al-Dimashqī drives this intention further in his attack on the divine nature of Christ. In this attack, al-Dimasqī refers to the biblical account of Moses in the tent of meeting and his request to see God (Exodus 33:7–23). 'Moses my servant, no one can look on me and live', al-Dimashqī quotes God's reply.[36] 'So how can you claim', al-Dimashqī

asks in light of this exchange between Moses and God, 'that Jesus was God, Lord and Creator, worship him, worship (*ta'budūna*) the cross, kiss it and place it before yourselves on the altars at the times of your prayers (which rebound to you)? All of this is because you associate [Christ] with God'.[37]

Al-Dimashqī seems reasonably familiar here with Christian liturgical practice and the rest of his argument focuses on the alleged divinity of Christ, the biblical evidence for which al-Dimashqī finds contradictory. The unstated conclusion is that Christians venerate the cross because they (wrongly) deify the one they claim was killed upon it. Their veneration of the cross, like their deification of Christ, is contradictory. If Christ was God, then no one should be able to look upon him (and, by extension, his cross) and live.

Further on in his text, al-Dimashqī pickes up the discussion again when he analysed the suspicious emergence of Paul as an Apostle.[38] According to al-Dimashqī, Paul came to prominence nearly 150 years after the life of Christ. He was not a disciple of Christ and he persecuted Christians. He converted, joined the Byzantine Christians and went into seclusion, attended only by four Christian scholars. Paul told these scholars that Jesus spoke to him personally, telling him that he was the Christ and to teach this to the four scholars. To each scholar, Paul taught basic Christological doctrine, though he taught different versions to each scholar, each version generally corresponding to West-Syrian Christology, East-Syrian Christology, Trinitarian doctrine and Melkite Christology. The four scholars went out, each one gaining followers who ascribed to their version of Christian doctrine. For al-Dimashqī, this explained Paul's central role in founding Christianity and the religion's basic sects who each disagree with the other.[39]

After a period of further seclusion, Paul emerged with the claim that Christ sent him, like Peter, as a bonafide Apostle. The early Christian community believed him.[40] With its support, Paul used his authority to permit the consumption of animals butchered unlawfully and to institute the Eucharist. He also traced an image of Christ onto a piece of cloth and gave it to Peter. According to al-Dimashqī, this was the 'first representation that the Christians placed in their churches'.[41] In similar fashion, al-Dimashqī posits that Paul also buried a piece of wood, calling it a portion of the True Cross. Centuries later, Helena (d. *c.*330), Constantine's mother, discovered it. This 'was the first Christian worship

and reverencing of the cross'.[42] For al-Dimashqī, then, Paul was responsible for introducing elements to, and therefore contaminating, Christianity. As for the practice of venerating the cross, it was the result of deceit. Nevertheless, the early Christian community rejected the purer form of Christianity. Indeed, it rejected Peter, as we are told in al-Dimashqī's account, in its blind following after Paul, an apostolic impersonator and inventor of lies.[43] For al-Dimashqī, this meant that Christianity – its history, development and pious acts like the veneration of the cross – were built on a false and ungodly foundation.[44]

Even though three centuries and different contexts separate 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Dimashqī, the two authors' texts share much in common. Both authors mounted counterattacks in response to allegations set before them by religious opponents. In both texts, Constantine is one of the earliest proponents of Christianity. For 'Abd al-Jabbār, Constantine was calculating in his suspicious replacement of Roman rites with Christian ones like venerating the cross instead of the moon. He was also harsh in his enforcement of this new rite. For 'Abd al-Dimashqī, the spread of Christianity under Constantine's zeal meant that the new corrupted religion eclipsed its older, purer form. In al-Dimashqī's account, though, it was Paul who was the real innovator. He made false claims to apostolic office. Having tricked early Christian communities, he introduced new practices and doctrines. In both texts, 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Dimashqī seem less concerned with blatantly accusing Christians of idolatry in their veneration of the cross. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, Christians flirted with paganism in their arbitrary replacement of some elements of Roman cultic practices. In most cases, Roman paganism remained as the essential makeup of Christianity. But when it came to the cross, for both 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Dimashqī, its veneration was tied irretrievably to Constantine's manipulation and Paul's deception. For these Muslim authors, their counterattacks were meant to expose veneration of the cross as ungodly piety that was an underhandedly human invention.

As with John of Damascus and his 'De haeresibus', some consideration can be brought to bear on the effect these arguments had by wondering who might have read 'Abd al-Jabbār's and al-Dimashqī's texts. In the latter case, we know that al-Dimashqī was responding to a Christian letter and so his response dramatises in some ways authentic Christian–Muslim debate. Even so, many Christians would surely remain unconvinced by al-Dimashqī's treatment of Christian history. Muslim readers, on the

contrary, could engage in a scholar's defence of their faith and in a sustained attack upon Christian claims. So it might also be said of 'Abd al-Jabbār's efforts to weaken views of Christianity by casting doubt upon its origins. In effect, Muslim readers could be affirmed in the strength of their faith and reassured of their identity as followers of a superior religion when they read texts like those from 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Dimashqī. Once again, then, counterattacks served as means for defining religious identities even as they helped believers navigate multi-religious environments.

Christian Counterattacks Intensified

Thus far, the texts we have examined feature rather direct counterattacks. A Christian, for example, acknowledges a Muslim accusation and turns it back towards Muslims. Or a Muslim author responds to Christian arguments with attacks upon Christianity. Other texts feature a more complex level of exchange. Most notable in this regard is the *Kitāb al-burhān* (*The Proof*) written by the East-Syrian 'Ammār al-Baṣrī in the latter portion of the ninth century. 'Ammār not only responds to Muslim accusations in his text, but also anticipates further Muslim responses and offers possibilities for how his readers might challenge these responses. In effect, he takes counterattacks very similar to those of other authors we have examined and intensifies them. The result is an attempt to confound Muslim reasoning and suggest the possibility of Islamic idolatry.

'Ammār's *Kitāb al-burhān* is rather unique as 'an attempt at connected systematic theology'.[45] As such, his *Kitāb al-burhān* addresses twelve theological topics ranging from doctrinal concerns such as proofs for the existence of God, demonstrations of the true religion, the Trinity, the incarnation and the crucifixion to matters of Christian practice like baptism, the Eucharist and veneration of the cross.[46] Covering this range of topics makes for a potentially monumental task, but 'Ammār structures the work as an apologetic text with abbreviated arguments that Christian readers who were engaged in religious discussion with Muslims could refer to with relative ease.[47] This seems to be especially the case since 'Ammār's choices of topics are also those that Muslims might find most disagreeable.[48]

But the structure and purpose of 'Ammār's text was intended for more than just practicality. To begin with, the twelve topics he addresses appear to follow the 'unfolding of the divine economy of [Christian]

salvation'.[49] So, a treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity allows for treatment of divine unity that, in turn, allows for discussions of the incarnation, the crucifixion and so on. More importantly, however, 'Ammār's exposition of Christian doctrine towards the beginning of the text provides the basis for his discussion of Christian practices towards the end of the work. This is particularly the case when it comes to the cross: the crucifixion of Christ and its place in the divine economy of salvation shapes the place and function of the cross in the Church's worship.[50]

In other words, Christian veneration of the cross had something to do for 'Ammār with a Christian understanding of the crucifixion. If the cross was understood by Christians to be the locus of his salvific victory, then it should also hold a central place in Christian worship and identity. So 'Ammār's treatment of the cross was twofold: he began with an explication of the crucifixion and later moved on to cross veneration. In both cases, 'Ammār deploys counterattacks aimed at Muslims and, anticipating their possible responses, presses his counterattacks even further. First, to the matter of the crucifixion: 'Ammār begins, as we might expect, with the Muslim accusation. 'They condemn us for saying that Christ was crucified, and they accuse us of attributing weakness to God or deficiency to Christ, and they hold it against us that we slander God and attribute to Him what "makes the heavens almost split apart because of it, the earth crack open and the mountains become completely flattened"'.[51] 'Ammār quotes from the Qur'ān (19:90) in his response, referring to a passage where the response to those who attribute a son to God was the undoing of the heavens and the earth.[52] In reply, 'Ammār counterattacks and turns the matter back to Muslims. Since they considered Christ to be a prophet lower in rank than Muḥammad, then how could Christ possibly be worthy enough of causing such an extraordinary feat? For 'Ammār, it was Muslims who clearly must be confused.

'Ammār presses further, noting that Muslims honour John the Baptist – revered in Islam as a prophet – despite the horror of his execution. Such a vicious death seemed hardly becoming of a prophet, yet somehow no weakness was attributed to God by Muslims as a result of John's death. For 'Ammār, this contradiction was sufficient to free Christians from the accusation that the crucifixion somehow attributed weakness to God. If John the Baptist could be killed without tarnishing God's honour, then surely Christ's death could achieve the same.[53]

With God's honour intact, 'Ammār proceedes to explain the purpose of the crucifixion in divine economy. As a result of the crucifixion, God released humanity from its fear of death and crushed Satan, the enemy. He did this publicly so that all could see the death of Christ's human nature. Then Christ rose from the grave and ascended alive to heaven. Since this was done in public, all humanity could understand its death in the death of Christ's human nature. Likewise, in Christ's resurrection, humanity could see its victory over death. Through the salvation of Christ came the salvation of all.[54] The crucifixion, therefore, was God's grace and gift, not a distasteful doctrine. Muslims, 'Ammār concluded, 'turn the thanksgiving which [they] should have, into unbelief and defamation!'[55]

With this explanation of the crucifixion in mind, we can turn to 'Ammār's discussion of venerating the cross. 'As to what they mock when we venerate and honor the cross', he writes, 'we will turn the argument back on them. It is much more surprising to see them venerating a stone, which the polytheists had venerated and honored! Truly, the wood [of the cross] is closer to fruitfulness than the stone!'[56] Here again we see 'Ammār, like some of his previous arguments[57] and like John of Damascus before him, acknowledging Muslim mockery of cross veneration and following this with a counterattack. 'Ammār refers to the Black Stone of the Ka'bah and, in a flourish, registers his surprise that a stone might be deemed more life-giving than wood (the cross). Anticipating the Muslim response to this counterattack – 'If they say, "We do not mean the stone per se"' – 'Ammār begins his explanation of cross veneration by noting that the wood of the cross is not what is important. Referring back to his discussion of the crucifixion ('As we have described'), 'Ammār explains that the cross is a symbol, venerated because

> [it] is the manifestation of our Creator in flesh that was crucified on it, through which [He] showed us the resurrection, the life, and the obliteration of sin. By touching the symbol [. . .] we magnify Him, and thus it brings us closer to Him, just as we honor the king by venerating even the hoof of his horse and the dust of his feet.[58]

'Ammār's brief explanation, which incorporates a king metaphor, centres on the value of the cross as a sign, an argument built entirely upon his

discourse on the crucifixion and its place in divine economy: the cross is venerated for the Christological events and truths it represents. And even more, in the context of Christian worship, the cross becomes more than a representation of doctrine; it becomes the means by which Christians magnify and draw near to God.

In 'Ammār's mind, this brief explanation should satisfy concerns about veneration of the cross. So he intensifies his counterattack with responses to Muslim explanations for the veneration of the Black Stone. If they say the stone is venerated because it came down from heaven, then 'Ammār responds, 'We heard that God has forbidden honoring the stone which He has created in this world, and that men have taken them as idols to worship'.[59] If Muslims say that they venerate the Black Stone over other created things because of Abraham (the one who fixed the Black Stone into the Ka'bah), then 'Ammār counters, 'So, you kiss a stone because of Abraham, and disown the cross on account of the veil (*ḥijāb*) of the Creator – I mean, the body of Christ?!'[60] In other words, 'Ammār wonders why something related to Abraham might be given preference over Jesus. If the reason for this is that God has allegedly required Muslims to venerate the Black Stone, then 'Ammār replies, 'You should not say God has prescribed it, since you confessed that He prohibited you from [honouring the stone], and He ordered you to combat the polytheists over it. And if this is not so, what does worship by venerating the stone really mean?'[61] With this, 'Ammār believes he has trapped Muslims in an insurmountable contradiction. They are not to worship idols, yet they claim that God has commanded them to worship created things.

Without a reasonable answer, as 'Ammār assumes, his readers may very well be left to wonder if Muslims are more than simply confused; perhaps they are inadvertent idolaters. In all of this, 'Ammār has taken counterattacks similar to those of other Christian authors and intensified them. By anticipating the ways in which Muslims might respond to his arguments, he is, theoretically, able to back them into a corner. In turn, not only does he offer some explanation for venerating the cross, but he also makes a claim for the cross's superiority and situates cross veneration in the context of God's divine economy of salvation. Ultimately, 'Ammār's readers may be convinced that he has left Muslims in a series of contradictions that suggest idolatry.

In yet another case, then, a defence of cross veneration becomes a marker that signals for readers the best way to adhere to Christian faith in

an Islamic context. For ʻAmmār, this marker is the result of both explanation and counterattack. In the case of the former, the veneration of the cross is briefly explained, but structurally, the section on cross veneration is situated within the wider economy of salvation. Thus, religious practice is connected to religious belief; veneration of the cross grows out of the cross's function within Christian Christology. But while this is structurally significant, it remains rather subtle and is, as a matter of content, especially downplayed in light of the emphasis ʻAmmār places on his intensified counterattacks upon Muslim practice. As a result, this section of the *Kitāb al-burḥān* does more to normalise cross veneration as a Christian practice even as it stigmatises similar Muslim practices. In turn, Christian readers might distance themselves from the stigmatised religious practice. Another result is that ʻAmmār effectively underlines an act that Christians perform and, though it may be similar to Muslim piety, it is the Christian act that is the pure one. Thus, ʻAmmār navigates Christians away from Islam and defines Christian communities as the ones whose worship is not in question.

Conclusion

In each of these Christian texts the essential result of their arguments is the ability to discern the allegedly pagan roots of Islam. In some ways, one might even be made to catch a glimpse of nascent Muslim idolatry. Of course, Muslims could play this game, too, turning their readers' eyes back to Christianity and questioning the history of its development. ʻAbd al-Jabbār and al-Dimashqī deploy this tactic in ways that would surely have been convincing for their Muslim readers and cast a shadow of doubt in the minds of any Christians who read their texts. In both cases, readers could easily become suspicious enough of the other religion to turn away from it. As a result, they might cling more tightly to the religious identity that made them followers of an untainted monotheism with pure foundations. Of course, in the context of their counterattacks, neither John of Damascus nor ʻAmmar al-Baṣrī make this claim for Christianity explicitly. But it is certainly implied as a result of their treatment of Muslim veneration of the Black Stone of the Kaʻbah.

Readers will recognise in these counterattacks the same strategies employed by authors of texts in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition. John of Damascus is certainly aware of Leontius' work in this regard and directly

perpetuates the tactic in his 'De haeresibus'. 'Ammār also picks up the strategy. His sources for this strategy are not clear, but it is possible that, based on his familiarity with Muslim practices, he simply exploited a feature of Muslim piety that was similar to the Christian practice of cross veneration. Perhaps more significantly 'Ammār's work shares characteristics with texts by Theodore Abū Qurrah and the two were near contemporaries who wrote in Arabic. This suggests that theologians from different eras and Christian communities, even different Christian confessions, were aware of one another's work and the arguments and approaches they developed in their texts.[62] Indeed, Abū Qurrah employs a similar comparative strategy in response to Jewish accusations in *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, a text we have already encountered and will refer to again in later sections.[63] In some versions of his debate with Caliph al-Ma'mūn, though this may be a later interpolation, Abū Qurrah also makes a direct comparison to the Black Stone of the Ka'bah.[64] In this light, it is possible that 'Ammār picked up the counterattack from Abū Qurrah.

Beyond the extension of a tradition of deploying counterattacks, one of the most striking features of the Christian texts in this chapter is that they give very little attention to *explaining* why Christians venerate the cross of Christ. 'Ammār does offer some clues in his text, but his brief explanation, and the metaphor of the king that accompanies it, fits within a much larger exposition of divine economy. If Christians were the ones primarily reading texts like the ones written by John of Damascus and 'Ammār, then perhaps they would not require a defence or explanation of their devotion to the cross. A more immediate need may have been the necessity for an explanation for the origins of Islam. Nevertheless, if cross veneration was a topos of Christian–Muslim theological engagement, especially in the early medieval period, then are there authors who address the matter by offering direct explanations for it?

In fact, many of the texts we will examine in the following chapters repeat the accusations and counterattacks observed above. But many soften their polemical edge and exhibit other features as well. As we shall see, these texts go much further to *explain* cross veneration, focusing on the inherent honour and power of the cross as well as its function as a sign.

CHAPTER 3

RESPONDING TO ACCUSATIONS OF DIVINE SHAME, EXPLAINING CROSS VENERATION AS A SYMBOL OF HONOUR AND POWER

For John of Damascus, the cross was the means by which 'the power of the demons and the deceit of the devil have been destroyed'.[1] The implication for John here is that the cross had power and the Black Stone of the Ka'bah did not. He leaves unexplored the notion that Christians might venerate the cross *because* it symbolised Christ's victory over other powers. In other words, John leaves aside explanation in favour of accusation and the dominant feature of his text is the counterattack he aims at Muslims in order to deflect their accusation of idolatry.

The Christian authors we discuss in this chapter, however, place emphasis on *explaining* cross veneration into greater focus. In these efforts, less space is given to comparing Christian and Muslim piety and authors instead concentrate on offering explanations for their veneration of the cross. For these authors, it was important to emphasise that the cross was a specific kind of symbol, to ground their explanations in biblical typology, and to demonstrate the power of the cross. These explanations for why Christians venerated the cross also had ways of reminding their readers of their religious identities and how those identities ought to make a difference for how they lived their lives in Islamic milieus.

Explaining the Cross as a Symbol Pointing to Honour and True Worship

In the late eighth or early ninth century an obscure Armenian priest by the name of Ghewond wrote a history describing Arab settlement in the region where he lived. As a part of his project, he preserved what he claims is an exchange of letters between the Muslim caliph 'Umar II and the Byzantine emperor Leo III. Contained in Ghewond's history is a series of questions from 'Umar. These are given as a list that, along with other evidence, suggests that what Ghewond preserved was a reconstruction of a previous letter, if indeed the exchange is authentic at all.[2] The questions cover many of Muslims' major concerns over Christian theology, scripture and practice. Leo's lengthy response follows the list of questions.

'Umar's question concerning the cross is direct, perhaps the result of an editor reconstructing and summarising: 'Why do you adore [. . .] the cross, which anciently served, according to the law, as an instrument of torture?'[3] The succinct question masks important implications. Indeed the cross was originally an instrument used to punish criminals. Since the death it caused was slow and painful, it was also tortuous and ignominious for those who endured it. Why venerate such a device? Why venerate something that would humiliate Jesus?

Indeed, from the Muslim perspective, the cross symbolised little more than the shame one might attribute to the criminal punished upon it. Recalling the arguments of the jurist al-Bājī whom we met in the Introduction, the cross fell short of the standard set for God's messengers in Islam. Muḥammad's life was preserved by God until he had garnered a large number of converts. In turn, God made them victorious over land and people. This victory continued after his death, incorporating many formerly Christian lands under the rule of Islam. Jesus, on the contrary, allegedly shed his blood after having achieved far less than Muhammad and other messengers. In al-Bājī's mind, as with many Muslims, the Christian account was one of failure and shame.[4] For his part, 'Umar was left bewildered that a device reserved for executing criminals could be raised as a symbol of adoration.

Leo responds to 'Umar and recalls that 'in your letter are some words apropos of the Cross'. Then he explains that Christians 'honor the cross because of the sufferings of that Word of God incarnate borne thereon'.[5]

Where 'Umar finds scandal and shame, Christians, according to Leo, find reasons to pay homage, for it is because of what Christ endured on the cross that Christians venerate it. Rather than humiliating Christ, Christians find that it honours him. In order to substantiate this explanation, Leo offers some interesting biblical examples that essentially provide Christians with prototypes of cross veneration – a feature we return to below – but he offers no explicit rationale beyond his biblical exegesis for why the cross might be a source of honour and not shame.

Theodore Abū Qurrah addressed the honour attributed to the shameful cross in a series of texts that address questions posed to him by Muslims.[6] In the fifth text, Abū Qurrah records that Muslims ask, 'If you prostrate yourself to the cross because Christ was crucified on it, why do you not prostrate yourself to the ass because Christ rode on it?'[7] The question is surely meant to mock as much as it is meant as an attempt to expose an inherent contradiction in Christian devotion. Abū Qurrah responds by clarifying that it is not merely because of Christ's crucifixion that the cross is venerated. In other words, the cross is not an arbitrary symbol. Specifically, humans are not saved by an ass, as they are by Christ's work on the cross. In general, though, 'it is the custom of human beings', Abū Qurrah argues, 'to give honor to the thing through which they attain their ultimate desire; and the more dishonourable this thing is, the more it must be honored'. As an illustration, Abū Qurrah observes that in a game of chess a pawn that is sacrificed so that a player might place his opponent's king in checkmate is kissed and honoured by the player for its sacrifice. It is much the same with Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross. Through the cross – 'the utmost form of dishonour' – he delivered humans from slavery to Satan. In return, Christians honour, but do not worship, the cross by prostrating themselves before it.[8]

Furthermore, the cross becomes the sign by which Christians demonstrate Christ's ironic victory over Satan. The means by which Satan sought to defeat Christ – the death and dishonour wrought by the cross – become the means by which Christ obtains victory. The cross is thus a 'sign of reproach' to Satan and Christians make the sign as a way of shaming him. In all of this, the honour of the cross is highlighted since Christ used its shame as a means of achieving victory. The shame intended by Satan is turned back against him. Hence, the cross is, ultimately, a source of honour and a symbol worthy of veneration.[9]

Similar elements appear in what has become one of the most well-known literary accounts of a debate to emerge from the early period of Christian–Muslim interaction. This is the late eighth-century disputation between Patriarch Timothy I, an East-Syrian Christian, and Caliph al-Mahdī. In the course of a very long and detailed theological discussion, al-Mahdī asks, 'Why do you worship the cross?'[10] Timothy's initial response is blunt: 'because it is the cause of life'.[11] When al-Mahdī disagrees and claims that the cross was the cause of death, Timothy clarifies that through Christ's death on the cross can be found resurrection, and through this, eternal life. 'It is through [the cross] that God opened to us the source of life and immortality, and [. . .] handed to us the fruit of life from the wood of the [cross], and caused rays of immortality to shine upon us from the branches of the [cross]'.[12] Through Christ's tragic crucifixion and death, comes life, and in turn, worship. '[A]s a symbol of life and immortality', Timothy proclaims, 'we worship one and indivisible God'.[13]

For these reasons, Timothy clarifies further, Christians honour the cross as the means by which eternal life is obtained. Timothy illustrates his logic with the image of a tree, its roots and its fruit. Of course, the fruit of a tree is what is most enjoyed. Nevertheless, the roots of the tree are given honour because of the role they play in producing the fruit. In the same way, the cross is honoured 'as the root of which the fruit of life was born'.[14]

A rational proof concludes Timothy's explanation, an unsurprising strategy since a demonstration of Christianity's appeal to reason would establish its superior claim to truth. In this argument, Timothy attempts to prove the universal love of God. He claims that this universal love, while it is seen in all creatures, is most clearly revealed through rational beings. But God expands the revelation of his love even further, choosing to offer an even more striking revelation of his love when he relinquished Christ's life over to death 'for the life, salvation, and resurrection of all'.[15] In other words, Timothy argues that there were progressive levels of revelation. These begin with the revelation of God's love evident in all creatures, increases in rational beings and culminates in the crucifixion of Christ.[16] On the basis of this sacrifice, Timothy concludes that it is 'only just, therefore, [. . .] that the medium through which God showed [his] love to all, should also be the medium though which all should show their love to God'.[17] Thus, the cross becomes the conduit through which

humanity can show its love and thankfulness to God since it was the means by which he showed his love to them. Far from a cause of death, then, the cross was a source of love. Therefore, it was deserving of honour.

In the late eighth century, not long after the account of Timothy's debate was recorded, another East-Syrian Christian, Theodore bar Koni, wrote the *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn* (*Book of scholia* [comments or interpretations]). The treatise covers a wide range of theological topics and Bar Koni devotes the tenth chapter to specifically addressing issues of controversy between Muslims and Christians. These include doctrines like the Trinity and the incarnation, but also Christian practices like baptism, the Eucharist and veneration of the cross. Bar Koni structured his work in the style of questions and answers exchanged between a master and a student. In the exchange, the student plays the part of the Muslim opponent.[18] This structure makes the *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn* a ready-made source book for Christians to use in their discussions with Muslims. By simply consulting it, the Christian reader could see what lines of argumentation would be most successful on any given topic and even anticipate the most probable Muslim responses.

This structure and intention become apparent in the section devoted to cross veneration where the student, playing the part of a Muslim, asks why Christians worship the cross. 'Have you not read', he reminds the master, 'that God has decreed, "You shall not worship any shape or form?"' quoting here from Deuteronomy 5:8. 'You who worship the cross', the student declares while voicing the Muslim accusation, 'clearly worship an idol'.[19] The master responds, clarifying that Christians do not worship the cross as a created object. It is not the wood of the cross that Christians venerate. If that were the case, then crosses would not also be made of other materials like gold or plaster. Clearly, it is not the object of the cross that it is important, but rather it is because 'Christ who was crucified for us that we [venerate the cross]'.[20] Christians venerate crosses because Christ was killed on one.

This response leads the student to question the meaning of the cross, or why, exactly, it is significant to Christians. Of course, Bar Koni is anticipating here the line of Muslim argumentation. The master elaborates:

> The significance of the cross is that it is the form of death by which Christ was [killed] for us. We are not ashamed of this manner of

> death, but we love him whose heroic strength was made manifest through his resurrection. We represent and honor the significance of Christ's death by the symbol of the cross.[21]

The cross is significant – and in turn it functions as a guide for Christian worship – because it symbolises Christ's sacrificial death, a death that he overcame by being resurrected. Implicit in the response Bar Koni places in the mouth of the master, as we have seen with Leo III and Timothy I, is the Muslim view that the crucifixion was a shameful death unbefitting Christ. Yet this was not so in the Christian view, as Bar Koni explains, for it was through crucifixion that Christ was most exalted. In the *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn*, it is fitting, then, that the cross is honoured for what it symbolises.

At this point, Bar Koni predicts a turn in the argument towards the alleged divine nature of Christ. Indeed, what special significance would Christ's death have if he were not divine? What value would the cross have if it merely symbolised another typical execution? And so the master questions the student: 'Do you or do you not confess that God was in Christ and that he carried in him God's strength?'[22] The student, speaking as a Muslim, responds that, in fact, he is only willing to allow that Christ followed the will of God; he was not divine, but very much 'like Moses and the other saints'.[23] Furthermore – and it is here that the Muslim denial of a crucified Christ becomes explicit in Bar Koni's text – he is unwilling to say that Christ was crucified since it would be altogether insulting.[24] The master balks at this response from the student and moves the argument to Christ's role as eschatological judge, a role affirmed in the New Testament as well as in the Qur'ān and Islamic traditions.[25] If Christ is to act as judge, then he will only be able to do so if he is elevated above humans. The only rational conclusion – and the one made obvious by scripture – is that Christ is above, and therefore different than, humans; he had a divine nature.[26]

On this point, Bar Koni concludes, Muslims are resisting scripture. 'You must clearly know', he reasons, 'that it was [. . .] by Christ's cross and his death that all rational minds are drawn to the wonder of his resurrection'.[27] He continues,

> Indeed, it is the custom of God to show his strength in weakness, so we know that 'the weakness of God is stronger than men'

> (I Corinthians 1:25). In this, God did not decrease, but was instead exalted all the more. Therefore, the cross of our Life-giver does not deserve to be mocked since it is, in truth, 'the power and wisdom of God' (I Corinthians 1:25).[28]

According to Bar Koni, the crucifixion is God's great triumph. As a result, the cross is the point where weakness transforms into strength. In turn, Christ's crucifixion on a cross was not a point of humiliation, but rather an occasion transformed into a moment of glory. As a result, the cross is worthy of honour and so Christians venerate it.

Additions to Bar Koni's defence of cross veneration appear in a different manuscript redaction of the *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn*. These additions are largely reformulations of Bar Koni's argument analysed thus far and may reflect developments in how Christians and Muslims were discussing cross veneration.[29] According to these extended remarks, Christians venerate the cross because it is the locus of Christ's redemption of humanity. Statements emphasising the triumph of divine weakness are repeated and care is once again taken to clarify that the material of the cross is not worshiped. This latter concern is reformulated by noting that Christians do not love precious stones, metals and materials of all kinds because of proscriptions against idolatry. But when those materials are formed into the shape of a cross, Christians are reminded of the one who suffered upon the cross for the sake of their redemption; they are inclined, then, to honour the shape that points them to their Redeemer.[30]

The juxtaposition of strength and weakness was also reformulated by adding to it connections between scorn and honour. Since Christ was despised because of the cross, so through the cross his followers ought to honour him. He was not ashamed of the cross and so neither should his followers look upon it in shame. Further, even though the cross was intended for Christ's humiliation, it ultimately became a symbol of his love. In turn, venerating the cross was a way of remembering Christ's redemptive love. Through veneration, Christians might also participate in Christ's sufferings, demonstrating that they are not ashamed of the cross. In all of this, Christians honoured the cross because it is worthy of honour by virtue of what it symbolised. As Bar Koni proclaimed, 'through what we see [i.e., the cross] we commemorate our Lord Christ, who, by his passion for us, redeemed us'.[31]

Moving ahead to the ninth century we come to one of the most well-known and widely read apologies for Christianity in the context of Islam, the *Risālah* (*Apology*) of al-Kindī. In this text, 'Abdallāh ibn Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī, al-Kindī's alleged Muslim interlocutor, calls for al-Kindī to convert to Islam. He even asks, 'Will you any longer cleave to what you must admit is a mere medley? I mean your doctrine of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and the worship of the cross?'[32] Al-Hāshimī's question reminds us that the nature of much Muslim–Christian debate followed the lines of Muslim concern with certain matters of Christian theology. Chief among these is Trinitarian doctrine, but married to that doctrine is the Christian practice that enlivened it. So the veneration, or apparent worship, of the cross appears just as troubling as the doctrine that undergirds it.[33]

Al-Kindī's response to al-Hāshimī's question focuses squarely on an explanation for Christian devotion to the cross.[34] He explains that Christians 'are moved to [honour the cross] by what we see depicted there of the majesty of Christ and His sufferings in the conduct of our redemption. He saved us from sin by His passion and the death He died upon the cross'.[35] As with Bar Koni, the cross is the stage upon which Christ's followers view their redemption. Consequently, the cross is, according to al-Kindī, 'the symbol before our eyes to stir our hearts that we may give thanks to him who ministers it and has bestowed it upon us. It is to Him we direct our worship and praise, not to the wood or anything else of which the cross is made'.[36] Christians honour the cross as a response to what was accomplished by Christ through it.

Like other authors, al-Kindī follows his explanation with clarifications about the materials used to make crosses. 'If, as you suppose, we worship the wood of the cross, why should we make it of any other material as we often do [. . .]? That surely is proof that we do not direct our worship to the material of which the cross is made, but to Him who is depicted on it'.[37] As further evidence, al-Kindī includes an oft-repeated king metaphor to illustrate the function and symbolism of the cross. Everything that is related to a king, al-Kindī argues, is honoured. This is particularly the case with images of the king. These are honoured as a means by which to honour the king and the majesty that is represented in the images. The king's loving and loyal subjects even kiss his hands and feet. In doing so, they 'enjoy royal favor'.[38] How much more ought this to be the case with Christ and his cross? '[S]urely we

ought to honor the cross [. . .] for there we see the majesty of Christ our King and the greatness of His grace toward us. There He was crucified for us'.[39] Once again, then, the cross becomes the locus of Christ's act of love for humanity. Christians respond in kind by honouring and even kissing the symbol of Christ's love.

Old arguments are reintroduced in the late twelfth century by the West-Syrian author Dionysius bar Ṣalībī in his *Oru'utā lūqbal 'ammā d-Arabāye* (*Dispute against the Nation of the Arabs*). Therein, we see Muslims asking once again, 'Why do you venerate the cross which is a means of death?'[40] Like 'Umar II and Caliph al-Mahdī, the Muslims represented in Bar Ṣalībī's text are concerned with the cross's relationship to death since it exposes Christ to unbefitting scandal and shame. Likewise, Bar Ṣalībī's suggested response follows earlier attempts to highlight the ways in which life comes through Christ's death on the cross. 'Death is a means of resurrection', Bar Ṣalībī writes, 'and resurrection is a means of life'. He continues, in language reminiscent of Timothy I, 'the fruit of life blossomed from the wood of the cross for us; and from its branches blossomed the fruit of immortality for us. As we honor trees and roots because they produce fruit, so do we honor the cross as the root and tree from which the fruit of life blossomed for us'.[41]

The discussion shifts, somewhat predictably at this point, to the material of which the cross is made. 'Why do you venerate the wood of the cross?'[42] Like others before him, Bar Ṣalībī clarifies that it is not the substance of the cross, be it wood or brass or any other material, that is worshiped. If that were the case, then Christians would venerate wood and other materials in whatever shape they took.[43] Instead, 'we venerate the symbol which is in the wood'.[44] In order to prove this point, Bar Ṣalībī provides a response that departs from earlier authors. He employs an argument that is innovative in the context of Christian–Muslim relations, but it is a near match to one Leontius used in the seventh century in the context of *Adversus Judaeos* remarks. Christians venerate the symbol represented by the cross, Bar Ṣalībī argues, 'just as you [Muslims] venerate the words of your prophet [Muḥammad] in the text of the Qur'ān. For it is not the paper and the ink and the binding and the cover that you venerate and kiss, but the words of God'.[45]

Unlike authors in Chapter 2 who turned towards Islam in order to launch counterattacks or deflect Muslim accusations, Bar Ṣalībī uses the

Qur'ān in an ingenious comparison that helps to illumine Christian veneration of the cross. His possible dependence here on Leontius may be brokered by familiarity with John of Damascus or the East-Syrian Christian Elias II (Ibn al-Muqlī) who, in the fifteenth chapter of his early twelfth-century *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* (*The Fundamentals of Religion*), writes in reference to the veneration of icons: 'That we venerate, kiss and honour them comes in place of the honour, paid by our friends, the Muslims, to the copies (of their Holy Scripture)'.[46] By employing this same kind of argument, Bar Ṣalībī reveals his familiarity with Islam. Indeed, Muslims see the Qur'ān as God's Word(s) revealed to humankind. In response to God's revelation, Muslims honour, but do not worship, the printed book of the Qur'ān as a kind of symbol of God's revelation. In the same way, Christians do not worship the cross, the revelation of God in Christ that it symbolises. Rather, Bar Ṣalībī writes, 'Through the medium of the cross which is visible we venerate God who is not visible'.[47]

Bar Ṣalībī presses the comparison further, moving from the text of the Qu'rān to the Ka'bah. He writes,

> It has doors of wood that people fashioned, as well as the shrine [itself, which is] built of stone and earth and wood. During your celebrations, you hang precious objects on its walls, and you venerate it. You do not say that you are venerating the rocks and the structure and the precious objects, but God, through the medium of the shrine. So, if you say [of us]: 'You venerate things', then you are also venerators of stones and things.[48]

Here Bar Ṣalībī employs a comparison with a long history. But unlike John of Damascus or 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, who used very similar comparisons some four centuries earlier, Bar Ṣalībī does not refer to the Ka'bah so that he can accuse Muslims of nascent idolatry. Like his comparison of the cross with the text of the Qur'ān, Bar Ṣalībī uses the Ka'bah to illustrate how Christians see the cross as a visible symbol orienting their worship towards the invisible Christ. Given the similarities of Muslim and Christian veneration, both Muslims and Christians are either guilty of idolatry or are being rightly oriented toward monotheistic worship. With Bar Ṣalībī, the comparison has taken a decidedly softer turn, one bent towards explanation instead of accusation.

A text from the early thirteenth century, Isho'yahb bar Malkon's *al-radd 'alā l-Yahūd wa l-Muslimīn alladhīna yattahimūna l-Naṣārā bi-'ibādat al-aṣnām li-sujūdihim li-l-ṣalīb wa-ikrāmihim ṣuwar al-Masīḥ wa-l-Sayyida wa-l-qiddīsīn* (*Refutation of the Jews and Muslims who Accuse the Christians of Worshiping Idols since They Venerate the Cross and Honour the Images of Christ, our Lady and the Saints*), repeats many of the arguments seen with other East-Syrian Christians like Timothy I, Bar Koni and the West-Syrian Bar Ṣalībī. According to Bar Malkon, Christians venerate 'the cross since (through it) we represent to ourselves the Redeemer; in this form, he took our passions upon him'.[49] To illustrate this point, like al-Kindī (who may have been an East-Syrian Christian, though his confession is ultimately not known) and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī in the ninth century, Bar Malkon employs the metaphor of a king. '[W]e kiss the carpet of the King', he writes, 'out of reverence for the King and not for the carpet, in the same way we exalt this figure which Christ has taken on [i.e., the cross], for it is the image of Christ's *jihād* in God. There is no question of exalting the wood or copper, rather the meaning which is expressed by both (materials)'.[50] With this, Bar Malkon addresses what Christians are worshiping when they venerate the cross – Christ, not the material of which the cross is made – and the event that the cross depicts – Christ's struggle (*jihād*) through which he brought redemption.

Bar Malkon's references to 'form' ('in this form [the cross], he took our passions') and 'figure' ('in the same way we exalt this figure [the cross] which Christ has taken on') are not entirely clear. Does he mean to indicate a cross with a corpus? This would not be entirely common in Bar Malkon's East-Syrian context.[51] In this light, perhaps he is referring to the actual shape or form of the cross. Indeed other authors made this point. In the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, Leontius and Pseudo-Athanasius comment that it was only when two pieces were intersected to form a cross that Christians venerated the shape. In other forms, the materials or images were meaningless.[52] Therefore, the cross is the shape that Christ took in his death for humanity. In turn, this is the shape that Christians venerate as a means of honouring Christ.

Bar Malkon also turns to the Ka'bah for illustrative help:

> Our kissing the cross or prostrating in front of it is nothing more than kissing the [Black] Stone in Mecca or prostrating towards the [Ka'bah] on all sides. And just as Muslims, who [. . .] should not

> adore [the Black Stone or the Ka'bah] instead of God, in the same way, Christians, when kissing the Cross for what it means and not for itself, should not adore it.[53]

Like Elias II and Bar Ṣalībī, Bar Malkon's comparison lacks the invective of earlier authors. He is content to use the Black Stone and the Ka'bah to demonstrate that the cross is a means for directing Christian worship towards Christ in thanksgiving for his redemption of humanity. Bar Malkon even underscores this point by appealing to Muslim (and Jewish) veneration of 'revealed Scripture as well as any material on which the name of God is written'.[54] As he explains, 'Their veneration does not apply to the material on which it is written [...] but to the meaning which is indicated by it, which is the recollection (*dhikr*) of God'.[55]

While Bar Malkon's argument suggests that Muslims and Christians share similar motivations for venerating objects as symbols guiding their worship of God, he makes a distinction between the idolatry of pagans and monotheistic worship. For Bar Malkon, these pagans included the ancient Greeks, Sabeans and early philosophers. While they, too, venerated images, they did so as a means for worshiping those images. Christians and Muslims, on the contrary, no matter the similarities the appearance of their worship had with pagan idolatry, were distinguished by the reference their worship had towards the one God.[56] This is a remarkable statement by Bar Malkon, placing Christians and Muslims on level ground next to one another (at least on the matter of veneration). Its most important function, however, was to help Muslim opponents appreciate that Christian veneration of the cross was not idolatry, but very much devotion to God.[57]

Three final examples demonstrate various authors' intention to explain Christian devotion to the cross in various Islamic milieus. In an early thirteenth-century text we learn about a monk, likely a Melkite, named Jirjī. The text is the *Mujādalat Jirjī al-rāhib* (*Disputation of Jirjī the Monk*), the account of an alleged debate between the monk and several Muslims. Like al-Kindī's epistolary debate with al-Hāshimī, Jirjī's debate may not be a historical event. It is possible that it is a literary invention, but it nevertheless illustrates the nature of authentic Christian–Muslim disputation in the medieval period. Moreover, the account of Jirjī's debate was copied in numerous manuscripts and transmitted widely.

This means that, similar to the account of al-Kindī's debate, it was an important and popular text that may have guided various Christian communities in their thinking about Islam or their theological encounters with Muslims.

Early on in the debate, Muslims object to cross veneration, claiming that the practice 'does not befit the worshipers of God' and that it amounts to nothing more than the worship and adoration of a piece of wood.[58] When Jirjī asks whether Muslims believe Christians *worship* the cross (the answer being 'Yes'), he dismisses the claim saying, 'God forbid that we should worship anything but God, his Word and Spirit, which constitute one essence'.[59] This is a compact affirmation of the Christian belief in God as a Trinity in unity, given by Jirjī with a Qur'ānic flourish used by many Eastern Christians (cf., e.g., Qu'rān 4:171). But the real substance of his response matches many of those summarised above: 'If we worshipped [the cross] why should we make crosses of various kinds and substances? And if we adored the cross only in the matter of wood [. . .] why should we adore it in other kinds of matter?' In the end, Jirjī asserts that Christians 'do not adore what is merely a type and a symbol'.[60]

When one of the Muslims asks for further clarification, Jirjī responds with a parable, an illustrative method he frequently employs in the account of his debate.[61] In this story, a nobleman has a servant whom he treats quite well. Even so, the servant rebels and is eventually thrown into prison. Undaunted by the servant's rebellion and with his nobility unwavering, the nobleman sneaks into the prison, dresses the servant in his noble clothes and takes the servant's place in prison, eventually even being executed in his place. At the nobleman's request, the servant preserves a symbolic remembrance of the event that, in turn, acts as a sign pointing to the reality of the nobleman's sacrifice and vicarious death.[62] As Jirjī reveals, the parable illustrates that the cross is not worshiped, but is used as a symbol and commemoration of Christ's sacrificial suffering and death that he endured in place of his people. 'Our intention', Jirjī explains, 'is not to worship or adore the wood, and the material substance of which [the cross] is composed; but we venerate and reverence the symbol'.[63] Christians do not worship the cross, then, but venerate what it symbolises and, in doing so, their 'mind is turned from the symbol to that which it represents'.[64] Once again, veneration of the cross leads to worship of God.

In the mid-thirteenth century, Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, one of the most well-known Copto-Arabic apologists of his time, employed a similar argument in his *al-Ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb al-Naṣā'iḥ* (*The Truths in Response to 'The Advice'*). Al-Ṣafī wrote the text in response to 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's *al-Radd 'alā l-Naṣārā* (*Refutation of the Christians*) and, in particular on this point, al-Ṭabarī's mockery of how Christians make and use crosses. Al-Ṣafī acknowledges al-Ṭabarī's concerns, but notes that Christians magnify the cross because of the purpose for which it was used in Christ's life. Al-Ṣafī explains that an object will be despised if it is used in a negative way. Such would be the case if a man strikes his son with a stick and kills him. If he does so then he will break the stick and hate to look at it. However, if he used the stick in a desirable way to teach his son, then he may adore it and keep it.[65] Since the cross, in Christ's case, was used for ultimate good, then Christians honour it. They do so, al-Ṣafī notes, in both outward and inward ways. Outwardly, they demonstrate their Christianity by tattooing the sign of the cross on their wrists (as many Copts do). Inwardly, they remember the cross so that they might conform to their master. In so doing they not only conform to Christ, but they assure themselves of being counted righteous, and not dismissed by Christ, on the Day of Judgement.[66]

Finally, there is a mid-fourteenth-century account of religious disputations between Gregory of Palamas, an Athonite monk and Archbishop of Thessaloniki, and several Muslims. These discussions take place after Turks captured a ship on which Gregory was sailing. They subsequently kidnapped the archbishop and later released him. In one discussion, a grandson of the emir asks Gregory to address what he perceives to be Christological contradictions inherent in Christian belief. The emir's grandson interrupts Gregory's response and asks, 'Why do you venerate the wood of the cross?'[67] Gregory offers 'the response which God had provided' and adds, 'Would you not accept those who would honor your insignia, and punish severely those who would dishonour them?'[68] The implication is that the cross symbolises Christ. It is his sign, the 'insignia' by which he is known and, as a result, is deserving of honour. No specific response from the emir's grandson is indicated, but Gregory's answer seems to prompt ridicule of Christian doctrine and the discussion moves on to other theological topics.

In a subsequent discussion, Gregory is asked by a group, 'Why do you place many representations in your churches and you venerate them,

even though God wrote and said to Moses: "Thou shalt not make a likeness of anything"?' (Exodus 20:4).[69] In response, Gregory equates veneration with honour by arguing that it is the same as friends who honour, but do not worship, one another. The purpose of icons, Gregory goes on, is not to worship them – that is strictly forbidden in scripture – but 'to be elevated through them toward God'. Far from being forbidden, Gregory exclaims, the worship directed towards God through an icon 'is good!'[70] Such was also the case with Christian veneration of the cross. '[W]e elevate ourselves through [representations]', Gregory concludes, 'to the glory of God'.[71] Like others before him, then, the cross was for Gregory a symbol of Christ that pointed Christians towards God in worship. Unlike many of the other authors, however, Gregory does not concern himself or his Muslim interlocutors with the theology that arises from the event of the cross and crucifixion. Instead, he is content at least on this topic to focus the meaning of the cross on its function as Christ's sign and the resulting honour that ought to be shown to it.

Clearly, each of these authors was keen to emphasise the symbolic value of the cross. A unique feature in the Islamic context is the way the authors examined here attempt to face the Muslim estimation of the cross as degradation. In the Christian view, the cross symbolises life, not death; it bestows honour upon Christ, not scorn. Moreover, in Christ's crucifixion the ultimate strength of divine weakness is put on display. Most importantly, these authors make clear that the object or material of the cross itself is not worshiped. Instead, the cross functions as Christ's sign and as a symbol reminding Christians of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. It also called to mind the redemption and eternal life they have through it. As such, the authors deem the cross worthy of honour.

In this attempt, Christian authors did well to articulate the ways in which Christ turned the shame of the cross into his honour. But such articulations, however detailed they were, potentially bypass Muslims' real concerns about the cross and the shame they associated with it. For Muslims, Christ was not crucified in the first place. Further, even if he had been, Muslims, very much like the jurist al-Bājī, thoroughly discount the theological necessity of such an act. Hence, if the crucifixion of Christ did not occur and was functionally unnecessary, then it mattered little what honour might be ascribed to the cross. It was merely a shameful piece of wood used to execute criminals. The Christian view that subverted the

cross as a torture device and made it a sign of honour seems unlikely to have touched upon these primary concerns for Muslims.

Of course, some of our authors do discuss some of these primary Christological questions in their texts. It is in only some of them, however, such as with Theodore bar Koni's discussion, that it is made clear how they relate to cross veneration. In this way, it is likely that authors were less concerned with convincing Muslim readers than they were of assuring their Christian communities of the importance of their devotion to a symbol that marked out their distinctive religious identities.

The Christians also point out that the cross is more than just a symbol. Even more, the honour Christians show the cross is a stepping-stone to the worship of God they are directed to offer him through the cross. As the means by which God showed his love to humanity, the cross, then, also becomes the conduit through which love is returned and offered in worship to God. Since this worship is brokered by the symbol of the cross, then cross veneration was also for these authors a practice that distinguished true worship.

Explaining the Symbol of the Cross with Typological Exegesis

Many of the authors in this chapter attempt to strengthen their explanations of cross veneration through biblical exegesis. In this way, they appeal to biblical precedents, arguing that pre-cursors of the cross or cross veneration can be located in the Old Testament or that such examples function typologically.[72] Typological exegesis of the Bible was not uncommon among Christian communities and was certainly not limited to ventures in finding examples of the cross in the Old Testament. For example, Origen, the third-century Christian theologian, was well known for his allegorical and typological readings of scripture.[73] Though not limited to Christian usage, the result for Christian exegetes was that many things in the New Testament or elements of Christian doctrine could be located or foretold via literal, allegorical or typological readings in the Old Testament.[74] In like manner, *testimonia*, collections of quotations from sources like the Old Testament, were compiled and used to ground arguments in ancient text.

When it comes to our authors, validating veneration of the cross meant giving their devotion precedents in ancient monotheism. As we

note above, for example, Leo III defends his claim that the cross bestows honour upon Christ by appealing to scripture. Accordingly, he asserts that in Isaiah 60:13, when the prophet Isaiah looks forward to the return of the Jews from exile and the reconstruction of their temple, that the wood of the cross is actually in mind: 'The fir tree, the pine and the box together, to render honourable the place of My sanctuary; and I will render glorious the place of My feet'.[75] Solomon, too, is made by Leo to speak of the wooden cross when he writes, 'Blessed be the wood by which justice is exercised' (Wisdom 14:7; here referring to the refuge offered by a wooden vessel in a storm) and 'It is the tree of life for all those who embrace it, and who attach themselves solidly to it as to the Lord' (Proverbs 3:18; here referring to wisdom personified).[76] Each of these passages has its own exegetical context, but they are made by Leo to support his arguments for the wood from which crosses should be made. Overall, Christians are simply following the example of their forebears when they venerate the cross.

Bar Koni refers to Old Testament texts concerning the Ark of the Covenant in his attempt to distinguish between the wood of the cross that is not worshiped and the person for whom it stands who is worshiped. The master in Bar Koni's text asks the student, 'tell me, do you regard the Ark of the Covenant as God or as silent wood?'[77] When the student responds that it was obviously just wood, the master asserts, 'Joshua son of Nun "fell on his face before the Ark of the Lord" (Joshua 7:6), did he not?'[78] The student agrees, so the master presses, 'Is it the wood {that Joshua} adored, or God?'[79] Of course, the student responds that Joshua was worshiping God because he lived in the Ark of the Covenant. When the master asks if the student means that God lived in the wood of the Ark, the student clarifies that God did not live in the wood, but his nature was joined to it as a means for showing the way he operated in the world. This clarification is then used by the master to demonstrate the way that Christ is worshiped by venerating a wooden cross and how this relationship is comparable and even more significant than the relationship of the Ark and God's presence.[80] In all of this, the Ark of the Covenant becomes, in Bar Koni's exegesis, a type of the cross.[81]

Bar Koni's use of the Ark of the Covenant in a literary context that involved, even if indirectly, Muslims, may at first seem like an odd choice. Why not also appeal to the text of the Qur'ān or to the Ka'bah in

the ways Bar Ṣalibi and Bar Malkon did?[82] Would a reference to the Ark of the Covenant from the Old Testament be effective to any Muslims who may have read Bar Koni's text? Of course, it must be recalled that aside from various Muslim traditions, the Ark is referenced specifically in Qur'ān 2:248 as a sign from God that legitimises authority as well as a chest carried by angels that preserves relics from Moses and Aaron. In this light, perhaps the Ark of the Covenant was a conscious choice since any Muslims who read Bar Koni's text may have been familiar with it and its use in the Qur'ān. Bar Koni could have had this in mind when he chose the Ark for his argument.[83]

While this may be the case, it seems more likely that appearances of Old Testament references like this highlight how Christian authors depended upon the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition. The latter texts referenced the Ark of the Covenant as a way of comparing Jewish veneration to Christian veneration of the cross. This rhetorical gesture made sense because Jews and Christians shared a scriptural perspective of which the Ark of the Covenant was a part; the Hebrew Tanakh/Old Testament was sacred to both religious communities. But such a move makes less sense in an Islamic milieu where a comparison to the Ark of the Covenant would be far less effective among Muslim interlocutors, or at least in an environment strongly influenced by Islam and the Qur'ān.

These kinds of references to the Ark of the Covenant, and Bar Koni's arguments in particular, also have an East-Syrian context. In the seventh century, Isaac of Nineveh tried to explain the power and function of the cross. In doing so, he appealed to the example of the Ark of the Covenant and claimed that it was a type of the cross. According to Isaac, God's presence resided in both objects – it departed from the Ark and 'resided mysteriously in the Cross'.[84] For these reasons, the cross was uniquely powerful and worthy of adoration. Clearly, authors like Bar Koni are snatching up, whether from the *Adversus Judaeos* or East-Syrian traditions, what they perceive to be ready-made explanations for why they venerate the cross.

It can also be said that, since many times it was not Muslims who were the primary readers of texts like Bar Koni's *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn*, Christian readers would be compelled by comparisons to the Ark of the Covenant and references to the Old Testament. As a primary audience, material from the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition or their own East-Syrian context would make for ready and accessible evidence. And so authors

like Bar Koni could draw material from these contexts while perhaps neglecting some of the unique intricacies of the Islamic environment in which he wrote.

Al-Kindī includes a similar discussion of the Ark of the Covenant in his text, but is far more wide-ranging in his use of the Old Testament. In each case, he is keen to demonstrate how the Israelites' reverence of the Ark was not idolatrous; for they did not honour the material it was made of, but were instead pointed by the Ark towards God whom they worshiped. In the same way, Christians venerate the cross, 'following their example', al-Kindī writes, as a means for worshiping God.[85] Like Bar Koni, al-Kindī's typological exegesis helps him to explain what Christians were doing when they venerate the cross and the importance wood does (or does not) have in that veneration. And like Leo III, al-Kindī claims that Christians are simply following the example of their forebears.

By far the most important and consistently used example among these authors is Moses. Leo explains that Christians honour the cross, having learned to do so from a command given by God to Moses. Here, Leo refers to Exodus 28:36–8 and the golden plate (*tsīts*) that God directed Moses to make as a priestly vestment. On it was engraved the phrase 'holy to Yahweh' (*qodesh layahweh*) – though Leo claims that the vestment 'bore the image of a cross, as of the Word of God who suffered for us in His human nature'.[86] The vestment was to be worn by Aaron on his forehead (on the front of his turban) and signify that he was bearing the guilt of the Israelites so that their gifts to God might be acceptable. For Leo, this golden plate prefigured the cross as a symbol and its function as the locus of Christ's vicarious atonement for humanity. Perhaps this is why Leo offers the curious invention of the cross allegedly inscribed on the plate (instead of the Hebrew phrase meaning 'holy to Yahweh'). Even more interesting, Leo claims that this is the source of the Christian tradition of making the sign of the cross on their foreheads.[87] Of course, Leo may have had in mind an exegetical tradition similar to one attached to Ezekiel 9:4, 6. Here the Hebrew letter *tāv*, at one time written with intersecting lines in the shape of a cross (either a '+' or reclining on its side as 'x'), was put on the foreheads of those who mourned the abominations committed in Jerusalem.[88] Like Tertullian or Origen in the third century, exegetes looking in the Old Testament for types of the cross could find ready material in this passage for their

pursuit.[89] In a similar way, perhaps, the sign of the cross is given Old Testament precedent by Leo.

At this point in Leo's argument, he steps aside from cross veneration and turns to the matter of venerating images. Doing this alongside his typological exegesis allows him, in the end, to further explain Christian veneration of the cross. 'As for pictures', he writes referring to icons and other sacred symbols, 'we do not give them a like respect [compared to the cross], not having received in Holy Scripture any commandment whatsoever in regard to this'.[90] Leo may not have been an iconophile, but nevertheless, he proceeds to find Old Testament precedents that justify icon veneration. Accordingly, the representation of heavenly figures that God commanded Moses to create for use in the tabernacle informs Christian use of images in worship. Through them, Leo notes, Christians commemorate God's saving work in their lives. It matters little what the images are made of and, by extension, whether or not the cross is made of wood. Like sacred symbols made by Moses in the Old Testament, the cross merely points worshipers to the truth it symbolises.[91]

Jirjī the monk explains that the cross is honoured as a way of commemorating God's kindness and mercy. These are shown in examples from the Old Testament. For example, Jirjī recalls the parting of the Red Sea, a miracle God performed when Moses held out his rod lengthwise, or vertically. The sea was reunited when Moses held the rod crosswise, or horizontally (Exodus 14:16, 21; 26–7).[92] Jirjī stretches the biblical account here – Moses only stretches out his hand, though God does tell him to stretch out his staff – but for Jirjī the implication is that the sea obeyed God when Moses made the sign of the cross over it with his rod (the combination of stretching it out vertically and then horizontally). The rod becomes here a type for the cross.[93]

Gregory of Palamas also draws from the life of Moses in his disputation with a group of Muslims. As we note above, these Muslims quote from the Torah – 'Though shalt not make a likeness of anything' (Exodus 20:4) – when they question him about why Christians venerate 'representations' in their churches.[94] After using the honour that friends offer to one another to begin his response, Gregory refers back to Moses as well. 'Moses [. . .] left almost nothing of which he did not make a representation', Gregory says, correcting the Muslims. Then he gives several examples, notably the representation of heavenly beings made for the tabernacle. For Gregory, anyone who might question Moses' example

would be told, 'icons and representations are forbidden so that one may not worship them as gods. However', as we saw above, 'if one is to be elevated through them toward God, this is good!'[95] Like representations made by Moses for the tabernacle, so the cross (and icons), according to Gregory, was a symbol meant to guide monotheistic worship.

Finally, several authors refer to the account of the snake Moses fashioned out of bronze and set on a pole as a means of mediation between God and the Israelites. According to the biblical account, during part of their sojourn in the desert, the Israelites grew weary and began to complain. God responded by sending fiery snakes that began to bite the Israelites who, in turn, died. After interceding for the people, Moses was directed by God to fashion the bronze snake and to raise it up on a pole (*nēs*). Anyone who had been bitten was to simply look up towards the snake so that he or she would live (Numbers 21:4–9).

Timothy I alludes to this event in his discussion with Caliph al-Mahdī about the relationship between the cross and death. God 'granted life to the children of Israel', Timothy explains 'through the sight of a deadly serpent'.[96] In the same way, the cross is not merely a tool of execution. Rather, it was used by God to bring life as he redeemed his people through Christ.

Bar Koni uses the same illustration for his discussion of the strength God demonstrated through the weakness of Christ on the cross. When God healed 'the Hebrews by the brazen serpent that Moses had crucified' one could perceive a symbol, according to Bar Koni, 'of the cross of Christ'.[97] Just as Moses raised up the pole, so Christ was raised up on the cross for the healing of humanity. Much more, he overcame this death and thus, through weakness, he showed his strength.

Bar Ṣalībī also addresses the matter of the cross's relationship to death and, in so doing, refers to Moses and the serpent in the desert. 'Just as the Israelites were restored to life by looking at a dead snake made of brass, the fruit of life blossomed from the wood of the cross for us'.[98] In this light, the ignominy of the cross was eliminated because, in Bar Ṣalībī's exegesis, it was ultimately the source of life.

Jirjī the monk refers to Moses and the serpent when he claims that Christians remember instances of God's mercy when they venerate the cross. Just like his reference to Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, Jirjī manipulates the biblical text here so that the bronze pole becomes a type for the cross. According to Jirjī, Moses obeyed God, fashioning a serpent

and placing it upon a pole. But he fixed the serpent to the pole lengthwise. Those who were bitten by snakes and looked upon the serpent continued to die. So God told Moses to place the serpent on the pole crosswise. At this point, the suffering Israelites looked up at the serpent and were saved.[99] For other authors, the cross could be merely connected to Old Testament types. For Jirjī, the cross is essentially made to appear in the life of Moses.

This transition from a mere type to an actual appearance of the cross in the Old Testament may be an invention of the writer who makes an account of Jirjī's debate, but there is also a curious history of linguistic development attached to these passages as well. According to the Hebrew text of Numbers 21:9, Moses places the serpent he fashions on a pole (*nēs*). In the Septuagint (LXX), Moses places the serpent 'upon a sign' (*epi sēmeiou*). This word choice likely made more sense to Greek readers who took it to mean something prominent and easily seen. Such is also the case with Ezekiel 9:4, 6, mentioned in connection with Leo III above. In the Hebrew text, the letter *tāw* is placed on foreheads, whereas in the LXX this becomes a 'sign' (*sēmeion*). Again, readers of Greek would find the reference to a general 'sign' much more easily comprehensible as opposed to a specific Hebrew letter with which they might be more unfamiliar.[100] More important for our purposes, however, linguistic moves like this allowed early Christians, especially those who already understood the cross of Christ to be a sign (*sēmeion*), to see the cross in the Greek text of the Old Testament. Such is the case with Justin Martyr who argued that Moses' pole was 'the figure of the cross'.[101] After all, both were signs, linguistically and theologically speaking.[102] The writer who made an account of Jirjī's debate may have been familiar with exegetical traditions like this one and made use of it in the disputation he recorded. In any case, the cross is, once again, made to appear in the life of Moses.

The result in each of these examples is that the reasons why Christians honour the cross are justified and given biblical precedent rooted in the ancient monotheism of their forebears. To do this, authors reach back into the Old Testament in order to find types for the cross. In this process, they also surely made use of early Christian forebears who employed the very same kind of typological exegesis. Thus, the authors examined here perpetuated a long tradition of finding the cross represented in the biblical text, a tactic that ennobled the cross, lent

much credence to it and gave it a very long history. In turn, it also gave Christians very good reason to honour it. This may not have come as a surprise to Christian readers. They may, in fact, have been overjoyed to have types of the cross in the Old Testament unveiled to them. In the context of debate with Muslims, it could function in the same way by adding depth to the foundations of a Christian practice that Muslims wished to call into question.

Explaining the Cross as a Source of Power and Victory

For most of the authors in this chapter, there was a miraculous connection between the cross and divine power. Of course, there was a long history of connecting the cross to power. Even in the second and third centuries, Christian communities attached divine power and protection to the symbol of the cross.[103] With Constantine in the early fourth century, the symbol of the cross took on more than just spiritual power; it became the sign of divinely sanctioned political power for Christians as well. Hence, Muslim antipathy for the cross can be seen, not just as theological objection, but also as aversion for opposing military power. In the Islamic milieus of our authors, however, the cross had lost its power as a symbol of military and political ascendency. Nevertheless, Christian communities retained the symbol of the cross as a sign of religious power and Christ's spiritual victory. This can be seen in the explanations of the cross as the locus of Christ's redemption of humanity. Hence, for Gregory of Palamas, the cross was 'Christ's banner of victory'.[104] In other words, the cross was a sign, very much like a military banner, pointing to Christ's triumph over death as the saviour of his people.

But other authors argue that part of the reason that the cross is venerated is because it continues to have power, perhaps not over other political entities, but over Satan and evil. In *Quaestiones et responsiones* (*Questions and Answers*), a very early text from around 700, Anastasius of Sinai warns:

> Note well that the demons name the Saracens as their companions. And it is with reason. The latter are perhaps even worse than demons. Indeed, the demons are frequently much afraid of the mysteries of Christ, I mean his holy body [. . .], the cross, the saints, the relics, the holy oils and many other things.[105]

In order to prove his point, Anastasius provides some examples of the demons' fear. According to one example, in the latter part of the seventh century John of Bostra was sent from Damascus to Antioch in order to question a group of demon-possessed girls. Some of the demons who controlled the girls said what they feared most of all was the Christians' cross, their baptism and the Eucharist.[106] They also add that the religion they prefer most is Islam – it lacks the cross, baptism and the Eucharist and Muslims do not believe 'the son of Mary to be God or son of God'.[107] Clearly, the cross had within it a certain power for which demons were terrified.

Anastasius had reasons for this discussion. One of his great concerns was Christians converting to other religions. One Christian in particular, Moses son of Azarias, had confessed to him that he had on numerous occasions converted from and back to Christianity. Putting Muslims and Islam in league with demons – they are companions in Anastasius' text – was a clever way to safeguard against Christian conversion. Claiming that the cross held a unique power over the demons would only further narrow the gate keeping Christians from becoming Muslims. Why would they convert if they not only feared becoming the demons' companions, but also knew that, as Christians, they held unique power over evil?

Anastasius does not directly address cross veneration here, but Theodore Bar Koni employs a similar argument when he explains the reasons Christians venerate the cross. He joins the power of the cross with both victory over sin and demons and writes that Christians honour the cross 'because of the redemption that took place there for us'.[108] But, as he goes on, he argues that this explanation also applies to 'the dissolution of all the evils that was given to us by [Christ's] mediation, dissolution which (was made) by the destruction of sin, confusion of demons, calming of natural suffering, the resurrection of the dead, and the enjoyment of new life'.[109] This power over sin, evil, sickness, death, displeasure and even demons was exhibited in Christ's victory on the cross. Because of this, the cross is venerated.

For his part, al-Kindī makes the very same claim, though much more succinctly: 'Christians do not worship the cross, we worship the power that dwells in it, the help that comes from it and the salvation received through it'.[110] For al-Kindī, the cross has power for all the same reasons that Bar Koni gives. Al-Kindī is more explicit, however, when he states

that power dwells in the cross and, for this reason, the cross is venerated. Likewise al-Ṣafī explains that the symbol of the cross is venerated in part because it has power over Satan and over physical ailments.[111] The argument is similar for Jirjī the monk. In his debate with several Muslims, one in particular accuses Christians of worshiping the cross, which in his mind had 'no power to do good or evil'.[112] Jirjī responds, arguing that, on the contrary, Christians use the cross as a sign that 'possess[es] power over unclean spirits and rebellious powers'.[113] This power existed because God showed his authority through Christ on the cross. In turn, Christ brought salvation to the world and its 'deliverance from the snares of [its] powerful enemy'.[114] In this way, the theological doctrine that some of the authors above used to explain what the cross symbolised is used here by Jirjī to argue that the cross has inherent power. This power was the result of its role in the divine economy of salvation. In other words, the vicarious atonement and redemption wrought by the cross of Christ yielded power. But Jirjī appears to go further than this, seemingly suggesting the cross neither simply represents power, nor does power merely dwell in the cross, but that Christians *use* the cross to gain power over their spiritual enemies.

Jirjī is not entirely clear on what he means to indicate here about how Christians use the power of the cross. But the notion is made rather plain in a ninth-century account of a disputation between Ibrāhīm, a monk from Tiberias, and several Muslims at the court of the emir 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī. Near the end of the debate the emir pushes the discussion on from matters of doctrine and scripture and says, 'Tell me, why do you worship the cross and believe in it? It is but a piece of wood, of no use and no harm'.[115] The monk expresses some surprise at the emir's question and accusation, thinking him too erudite to hold such a view. Ibrāhīm's response is straightforward: 'No, by my life, we do not worship [the cross]. Were we to worship it, we would not treat it as we do, displaying it on every mountain and in every place'.[116] The implication seems to be that crosses are so commonplace among Christians that it can hardly be a special object set apart to worship as an idol.

But the monk goes on:

> [N]o one should blame the Christians for their love of the cross, because many successes [. . .] have come to them through it. This is

> because the cross is the standard of power, the banner of victory and of salvation from error. If a Christian professing belief in Christ and in the sign of the cross wished to drink lethal poison, to expel demons by force, or to enter fire naked, in the name of Christ and with the sign of the cross he could do it.[117]

Unlike other authors examined thus far who believed the cross had power over Satan and his demons, Ibrāhīm pushes this power to a further dimension. The cross, he claims, has supernatural power over other elements as well.[118] As such, his bold claim elicits exclamations from the monk's interlocutors. If his claim were true – if he could actually perform the miracles he describes – then he would surely win the debate. The monk responds to their exclamations almost wryly, 'You should also perform miracles in the name of the Black Stone, as the Christians do in the name of Christ and the cross'.[119]

The monk's rejoinder recalls the stock comparison between Muslim and Christian veneration. But the monk does not use the comparison as an explanation or an accusation. Instead, he uses it to set up a kind of power contest intended to discern the true religion among Muslims and Christians. The first stage of the contest is entirely rhetorical.[120] One of the Muslims asks what kind of a miracle Ibrāhīm would like to see. The monk pokes back, 'I ask nothing extravagant from you: heal an inflamed eye, reduce a fever, or cure a stomachache'.[121] These miracles ought to be fairly simple compared to what the monk claims the cross is capable of accomplishing. In response, a Muslim implores Ibrāhīm to join him in Mecca where he will see the power of the Black Stone. The monk counters that the cross's superior power is not limited by geography. Though a piece of the true cross could be found in Constantinople, its power was not limited to that city.[122] The contest at this point is merely rhetorical, but Ibrāhīm's response here makes him the winner.

The second and subsequent stages in the power contest follow the monk's bold claim quoted above. Accordingly, the emir's physician mixes lethal poison into a drink. The monk invokes the name of Christ, makes the sign of the cross over the drink and swallows the liquid. He remains unharmed. One of the Muslims takes a similar drink. Invoking God and Islamic tenets (God's oneness and power, the apostleship of Muḥammad and Islam's superior truth), he drinks the liquid, collapses and dies.[123] Ibrāhīm wins another round of the contest.

Next, a girl is brought in who is allegedly possessed by a spirit. The monk makes the sign of the cross on her and invokes the power of Christ and his cross. The spirit leaves the girl immediately. Another round won for the monk. The Muslims, however, remain ambivalent. 'They all said', so goes the account of the debate, '"Only fire will bring certainty"'.[124] Thus, in the final test, even though the monk asks for some time to rest, the Muslims request wood in order for a fire to be lit. But the emir raises the stakes. 'What could we do with firewood? Let us call instead for a brazier full of embers'.[125] Undaunted, the monk makes the sign of the cross over the burning embers, places his hands inside and mixes them in the embers. He remains unharmed. Ibrāhīm wins this final round, too. Accordingly, several of those who observe the contest immediately convert to Christian faith and the monk is eventually allowed to go on his way.[126]

The result of Ibrāhīm's power contest is clear: Christianity emerges as the one, true religion because the cross of Christ is uniquely powerful over spiritual and natural forces. Though left unstated, the outcome of the power contest also conforms in many ways to how the other authors examined here explain the power of the cross. Simply put, the cross was a source of power. In some cases it even actively wielded great power that brought Christians victory. For these reasons, Christians venerate it.

Of course, the cross as a source of power, against Satan or all other manner of evil, was yet another idea plucked from earlier sources like those in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition. But its development in texts from Islamic milieus introduces new considerations. Significantly, it creates a tension with those authors who chose to emphasise the inherently counterintuitive nature of the cross in Christian thinking. Most notably, Bar Koni argues that the weakness of the cross – it's degradation and function as a device of torture – was the occasion of God's strength. This juxtaposition made the cross a scandal and a stumbling block. For some authors, honouring and adhering to this stumbling block was part of what defined Christians as a distinct religious community. Other authors, however, attempt to blunt this scandal by demonstrating its great power.[127] For them, the cross ceases to be a stumbling block and becomes a symbol capable of setting a victorious pace for those who wield it. What may have made this effective in an Islamic milieu were the traditions ascribing healing power to the Qur'ān. For example, in one Islamic tradition, a snakebite (or scorpion sting) is cured when one of

the Companions of the Prophet recites the first surah of the Qur'ān, *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*.[128] In an Islamic milieu, then, asserting the power of the cross and its symbol had the potential to subvert the power of a competing symbol.

Beyond this context, the power of the cross could be easily apparent when the symbol was picked up as a sign of military and political power by the Roman Empire. But exploiting the imperial power of the cross seems less useful to non-Muslim communities living under Islam. Hence, Christian authors emphasise the cross's power over Satan and, especially for the author who took account of the monk Ibrāhīm and his debate with Muslims, exploit the cross's power over other realms as well.[129] In such cases, the power of the cross is used as a proof of Christianity's unique truth instead of the might of a Christian empire.

Conclusion

From these authors' explanations for why Christians venerate the cross it becomes clear that the cross was for them an important theological symbol. As such, the cross represented a moment in the life and death of Christ, a part of the climax in the divine economy of salvation. When these authors faced the cross they saw the moment of their redemption. In response, they bowed and venerated the cross, knowing what it represented. But it also becomes clear from these texts that the cross was also more than just a symbol that helped to remind Christians of events and doctrines that were central to their faith. The cross was also a sign that indicated the need for a response. As such, it acted as a conduit for Christian worship of the one God. In the cross, Christians saw the love of God given to them and responded in kind by offering their worship to God through their veneration.

Paramount among the achievements symbolised by the cross was Christ's victory. As many of these authors make clear, wrapped up in Christ's victory was the cross's inherent power. This included power over Satan and his evil, but also extended to demonstrations of power that might prove Christianity's superior claim to religious truth. This is especially apparent in the monk Ibrāhīm's power contests. By besting his Muslim opponents, he participated in the victory of Christ and offered a colourful explanation for why Christians venerated the cross.

Beyond these ways of explaining cross veneration, a few of these authors find it difficult to resist an explanation that does not feature a comparison to Muslim piety. The relatively irenic examples of Elias II, Bar Ṣalībī and Bar Malkon are noted above. But in the letter from Leo III, his comparison is very much like the accusations we saw in Chapter 2. In his insistence that the wood of the cross holds no meaning for Christians, Leo writes to ʻUmar II:

> But you, do you feel no shame to have venerated that House that is called the [Kaʻbah], the dwelling of Abraham, which as a matter of fact Abraham never saw nor so much as dreamed of, in its diabolical arid desert? The House was existing long before Muḥammad, and was the object of a cult among your fellow citizens, while Muḥammad, far from abolishing it, called it the dwelling of Abraham.[130]

Leo goes on to detail the 'diabolical nature' of the Kaʻbah and other unseemly features of Islam. He does so under the pretense that proving his accusation will therefore remove any offense he may otherwise cause ʻUmar.[131]

Significantly, most of the other comparisons to Islam examined in this chapter take on a different flavour. Instead of deflections or means by which to launch counterattacks, authors like Elias II, Bar Ṣalībī and Bar Malkon use elements of Muslim piety as means for illuminating Christian veneration of the cross.[132] Their comparisons are free of the invective that Leo employs. Why might this be the case? Perhaps the counterattacks simply proved ineffective. Or perhaps outside of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries – when texts like Leo's and some of those examined in Chapter 2 were written – a new tradition emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that cast aside counterattacks meant to attach the Black Stone of the Kaʻbah to a history of idolatry. This new tradition, at least as it appears in the texts that we have examined, seems to be limited to some East-Syrian Christian authors and Bar Ṣalībī, a West-Syrian Christian.

Given the consistency with which the cross appears in Christian–Muslim debate, it also seems clear that Muslims did not perceive the cross to be an object of peripheral importance to Christians. Likewise, these Christians' responses place the cross at the centre of the Christian

story. Perhaps as a result of this significance and the growing familiarity that many Christian communities had with Islam, most of the authors in this chapter demonstrate their care to explain what the cross meant instead of focusing on accusing Muslims of idolatry.

One might also surmise that, even though each author's context and community clearly varied, perhaps the authors, in wanting to offer Christian readers something concrete to say in response to Muslim accusations of idolatry, reveal the multi-religious nature of the contexts in which they lived and the degree to which their lives intersected with Muslims. For in many cases, Christian readers did not simply need a reminder of what made them distinct from Muslims or what the origins of Islam may have been. It is likely that many Christian communities living during the periods and in the contexts where these texts were written needed a response to offer those Muslims with whom they were having discussions. In most cases, the authors included in this chapter provide just these kinds of explanations.

Whatever the case may be, it seems clear that the authors in this chapter were more interested in explaining why Christians venerated the cross instead of simply sidestepping an explanation in favour of a counterattack. So, for the most part, their explanations take the form of theological discourse, apologetic exegesis and assertions of power in order to demonstrate that the cross was not only worthy of honour, but was also a symbol of powerful victory in a context of competing truth claims. The point was not for readers to wield the power of the cross and its sign in ways like the monk Ibrāhīm. Rather, by reading accounts like his and others, Christian readers took the power of the cross as an assurance of the strength of their religious identity vis-à-vis the Muslim communities around them.

Finally, one of the more remarkable features of the authors examined in this chapter is the incredible degree to which the explanations they offer for cross veneration match one another. Of course, the cross has rather specific meaning within Christianity, so it is no great surprise to find limited variety in the explanations given for the practice's existence. Even so, the narrow spectrum of issues surrounding the object of the cross to which they chose to respond is often very similar. For example, the authors are quick to address the substance of which crosses are made (e.g., wood) and why these substances are not important to cross veneration. This feature of our texts suggests that this was a common

Muslim concern that Christians were well aware of in the context of inter-religious encounter.

Similarly, the illustrations these authors employ – and this is particularly the case with the East-Syrian authors – are often very similar. Examples such as likening the cross to the roots of a tree, explaining its symbolism with stories or metaphors of a king, or the ways in which some compare veneration to Muslim devotion to the Black Stone, the Ka'bah or the Qur'ān appear consistently. Again, some of these might easily occur to many Christians explaining cross veneration in Islamic milieus, but others suggest a certain degree of awareness these authors had of other Christian writers who had gone before them. In this way, some of them were surely aware of and reading texts previously written by Christians addressing the same concerns that arose out of other Islamic contexts. And to be sure, there is much evidence here to suggest that texts from the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition were valuable to these authors' apologetic cause.

So the sharing of information and a shared emphasis upon explaining cross veneration is common among the texts examined in this chapter. But like the other texts we have considered thus far, these authors were also surely keen to offer their readers something that would reinforce the stability of their faith against the mounting pressures of Islam. In this way, explanations of cross veneration, beyond giving Christians something specific to say to the Muslims in their midst, could also come as needed theological affirmation and doctrinal nourishment. This is particularly the case with Jirjī's and Ibrāhīm's disputations. Those who read the descriptions of their encounters could see enacted before their eyes monks who were triumphant over Muslims as a direct result of how they honoured the cross and wielded its power. The cross may no longer have indicated military or imperial might, but those who read of these power contests could be reassured of the cross's power and be inspired to cling to their practice of honouring it. Doing so would be a way of marking out their distinctive Christian beliefs.

Likewise, readers might receive fresh reminders of why cross veneration was significant, how it related to the essence of their faith and how it was necessary to the task of being set apart as Christians living in multi-religious contexts. In these ways, arguments like the ones offered by authors examined in this chapter are not merely explanations and defences of cross veneration. Even more, they also function as ways of defining the religious identities of those who read the texts and helping

them to navigate contexts influenced by Islam, other religious practices and Muslims who might mock their devotion. In the same way, these arguments could nourish beleaguered Christian communities feeling the pressure to absorb Muslim influence or convert to Islam. Seeing the importance of their veneration of the cross would give them renewed commitment to the practice at times when devotion to the cross waned – a discussion we spend more time on in Chapter 4.

With this in mind, we turn in the final chapter to a selection of texts that, in a number of cases, repeat many of the arguments featured above. What separate the texts in Chapter 4, however, are some remarkable innovations that the authors apply to their defences and explanations of cross veneration. As we shall see, these innovations move beyond the theology that the cross symbolised and emphasise the person of Christ and his enduring impact on the shape of Christian communities living in Islamic milieus.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING THE CROSS A *QIBLAH* AND A PROXY FOR CHRIST

By now we have covered texts spanning seven centuries. We have seen the nature of Muslims' accusations concerning the ways Christians seem to worship the cross of Christ as an idol and an addition to the one God. We have also uncovered many of the most common strategies deployed by Christian authors in their defences of and justifications for venerating the cross as part of their monotheistic worship of God.

The arguments the Christian authors in this chapter employ match in many ways the arguments used by authors with whom we have already become familiar. However, they also exhibit highly innovative explanations and justifications for cross veneration. The originality of their arguments is especially plain when considered in light of the many texts considered thus far. This innovation is not just connected to original explanations. Even more, the authors we examine below are keen to emphasise that the cross is more than just a mere symbol; the cross is the very presence of Christ. Similarly, veneration of the cross is not simply the natural response to the honour that is due it. Even more, venerating the cross, for these authors, is a means of marking Christian communities out as distinct in the Islamic milieus in which they existed.

Of course, as we considered in previous chapters, the notion that defences of cross veneration helped to define Christian identity was at least implied by the arguments of the authors we have examined. The authors in this chapter, however, make this intention explicit by bringing it to the centre of their explanations for why Christians venerate, and should continue to venerate, the cross of Christ. For these

authors, the cross becomes a crisis point demanding a response from those who posture themselves toward it. They either adore it, sharing in the shame and honour Christ experienced through it, or they reject it and thereby lose everything that really mattered.[1]

The Cross is a Christian *Qiblah* Imbued with Special Honour

We begin with the West-Syrian theologian Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī. Very likely a Syriac speaker, Abū Rā'iṭah was among the first Christians to write theological texts in Arabic. He signifies the shift many Christian communities were undergoing at the time towards favouring Arabic as a spoken and written language. In the early ninth century, perhaps between 815 and 825, Abū Rā'iṭah wrote his *Fī ithbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyyah wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-muqaddas* (*On the Proof of Christianity and the Trinity*). In this treatise he attempts to defend and explicate the doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation and the reasons for which one might change from one religion to another. In essence, he seeks to address topics that Muslims find objectionable. These include not only matters of Christian doctrine, but also Christian practices since these are often related to doctrine. Among these practices was the Christian 'exaltation of the Cross'.[2] By focusing on these topics, Abū Rā'iṭah provides his readers with an idea of the general structure of Christian–Muslim debate, along with answers based on scripture, reason and logic to common Muslim theological objections.

After a lengthy discussion of central Christian doctrines and the scriptural basis for the incarnation of Christ, Abū Rā'iṭah turns to the matter of cross veneration. He says, 'As for [Muslims'] statement concerning our exaltation of the Cross, while we forbid the worship of idols, our exaltation of [the Cross], o my brother, [even though] it is especially contemptible, is a clear indication of our rejection of the worship [of idols]'.[3] Abū Rā'iṭah offers a number of qualifications here in his remark and there is much that lies behind his statement that is unarticulated. What, exactly, does he mean when he rather generically acknowledges the '[Muslims'] statement' concerning cross veneration? Abū Rā'iṭah does not tell us, so we must use what he does say as a kind of mirror by which we might possibly see reflected in it the opponents' criticisms to which he responds.[4] To begin with, we are quite well aware that Muslims were concerned that, when Christians honoured the cross,

they were worshiping it. With this suspicion in mind, Muslims accused Christians of idolatry. In this passage of Abū Rā'iṭah's text, he immediately follows his acknowledgement of the '[Muslims'] statement' with the almost parenthetical clarification that Christians do in fact 'forbid the worship of idols'. This clarification must surely reflect the Muslim suspicion that cross veneration was idolatry.

Moving further, Abū Rā'iṭah also interjects – again, almost parenthetically – that Christians honour the cross, '[even though] it is especially contemptible'. This statement would seem to reflect the Muslim confusion over why Christians would honour something that is a symbol of death, torture and capital punishment. While Abū Rā'iṭah apparently acknowledges this concern, he also seems to avoid addressing it, a point to which we return below.

Abū Rā'iṭah chooses to focus instead on the matter of idolatry. Contrary to Muslim belief, Christian veneration of the cross had, according to Abū Rā'iṭah, the ironic effect of deterring and condemning idolatry, not representing it. If Christians did condone the worship of idols, then they would not restrict themselves to a symbol of contempt. Instead, they would surely offer preference to 'the image most precious and of the finest material'.[5] But they do not do these things. In fact, they 'do not turn to anything other than this despised form [i.e., the cross]'.[6] In other words, the cross was stark and austere in keeping with its connections to contempt. Idols, on the contrary, were embellished and ornately adorned. With this in mind, the question, Abū Rā'iṭah reasons, must be asked: 'if we were to make [the cross] from the finest and most beautiful things, would not someone who is intelligent think of us that we are seeking to worship graven images in some way or other?'[7] The implication seems to be that the material from which the cross was made or the manner in which it was adorned could help to indicate whether or not it was being used as an object of worship.

Not all of the authors we have seen thus far follow Abū Rā'iṭah on this argument. Before him, Leo III purportedly explained in the eighth century that the 'wood and the colors' with which crosses were made were not given 'any reverence'.[8] Likewise, East-Syrian Theodore bar Koni in the late eighth century and al-Kindī (possibly an East-Syrian) perhaps later on in the ninth century argued that since Christians make their crosses out of many materials, some of them quite precious, then the substance of the cross was clearly of little importance.[9] In later

centuries, authors like Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (twelfth century), a fellow West-Syrian, and the Melkite monk Jirjī (thirteenth century) argued that, since the cross was a symbol, the material substance of the cross was of no consequence.[10] For these authors, it did not matter whether the cross was made of simple wood or adorned with gold; the real meaning and importance of the cross lay in its value as a theological symbol.

For Abū Rā'iṭah, however, the material from which the cross was made did matter. In one, embellished form, it suggested a connection to idolatry. In another, simple form, it represented a repudiation of idols. The unembellished cross seems to be connected in Abū Rā'iṭah's logic to the inherent nature of the cross itself as a form of torture and to the sacrificial punishment Christ endured upon it. In fact, at the very beginning of his text, Abū Rā'iṭah expounds upon the paradoxicality of Christian faith. The Christian religion is true, he says, because it does not encourage its followers to go after power, worldly possessions, 'the Hereafter' or fine ornamentation. On the contrary, it is 'a Man crucified, weak in outward appearance' who is set at the centre of Christianity.[11] In this light, adorning the cross with the finest materials would be, to Abū Rā'iṭah, antithetical. Adorning the cross will only make it seem as if Christians are worshiping it. If they leave it as it is – it already stands as a despised symbol of torture and punishment – then that can only underscore its function as a sign for Christian repudiation of idolatry and embrace of monotheism.

Of course, Abū Rā'iṭah is not offering to his readers here a primer on the construction, formation or decoration of liturgical crosses. Why, then, does he stand alone among the authors we have included in this study so far – some of them coming from different Christian traditions while others, such as Bar Ṣalībī, sharing his Christian confession – in his preference for wooden crosses? Is it possible that he has his own liturgical context in mind as ready evidence to exhibit in response to the Muslim accusation of idolatry? If this is the case, then he seems to say, 'Look at our plain, wooden crosses. Clearly they are not the stuff of idolatry'. Indeed, some evidence coming from churches and monasteries in the early medieval period suggests that West-Syrian Christian communities had generally aniconic preferences. But evidence of embellished ecclesial ornamentation exists among their communities as well and varies when considering influential churches or village churches.[12] As we have already seen, Bar Ṣalībī, though he

comes three centuries after Abū Rā'iṭah, does not have any reservations about how crosses are decorated.

A more plausible answer to the question of Abū Rā'iṭah's preference for wooden crosses may instead come from another text, the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*.[13] This story was a Syriac legend from perhaps the early ninth century, so it existed in the same period as Abū Rā'iṭah. The purpose of the legend was to explain the rise of Islam from a Christian apocalyptic perspective. It features stories of a monk named Baḥīrā (or Sergius) who recognised Muḥammad as a prophet and influenced the early development of his preaching. But the details given are not offered in order to substantiate the prophethood of Muḥammad or his message (as the story functions in Islamic sources),[14] but to give a Christian perspective of Muḥammad's prophethood and ministry.[15] In one particular passage of the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, in its East-Syrian recension, the monk preaches to people in Persia[16] and proclaims that they should only venerate one cross in their worship gatherings, as opposed to many crosses. Likewise, churches should not house many crosses, but just one cross. His message is not well received by his listeners and he is chased into the desert.[17]

Another Syriac recension of the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* – the West-Syrian recension, a tradition of which Abū Rā'iṭah was a part – departs in a significant way from the East-Syrian recension. In the West-Syrian recension, the monk was banished because he preached his message that 'only one cross should be placed in the church and that we should worship only one, since Christ too was crucified on a single cross, and not on many'.[18] There is not anything distinct here, but the monk intriguingly expands on his defence, arguing that, 'It is not proper for us to worship a cross of stone, silver, gold, copper or of any other material except wood, lest the matter would resemble to us the idols which the pagan peoples, the idolaters, make'.[19] His message brings him persecution from bishops and priests, but more importantly for our purposes, his answer is very much like the response given in Abū Rā'iṭah's *Fī ithbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyyah wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-muqaddas*.

What might explain these curious arguments – whether in defence of a singular cross or for the wood of the cross – with regards to cross veneration? Could it be that Abū Rā'iṭah is attempting to be quite literal? In other words, since Christ was crucified on a cross made of wood, then crosses used in Christian worship should also be made of

wood. In this way, Abū Rā'iṭah's position would not be unlike the monk in the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* who advocated only one cross in churches since Christ was crucified on a single cross. Such literalism, it might be thought, could work to counteract accusations of idolatry since making more of the cross, either by embellishing it or multiplying it, might suggest that Christians had begun to idolise it.

But there may be a deeper explanation. Stephen Gero suggests that the monk's message in the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* regarding a singular cross may be connected to the wider context of Byzantine iconoclasm. According to Gero, the episode in the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* is similar to Byzantine texts that both iconoclasts and iconodules used in support of their agendas. In one such text, Nilus of Ancyra (d. *c.*430), a Byzantine monk, argues that a single cross should be installed in the sanctuary of a church, since it was by one cross that humanity was saved and the rest of the church should be decorated with scenes from the Bible. The iconoclast version of the text eliminates the suggestion for artistic depictions of biblical scenes and instead advocates a single cross in a church with whitewashed walls.[20] Gero concludes on this basis that the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* either draws its inspiration directly from Byzantine texts like these or was inspired by iconoclastic views originating in Byzantium in general.[21]

Of course, it is possible that the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* is dependent in some way on Byzantine sources. We cannot be certain, however, and the Byzantine influence, whether direct or indirect, seems unlikely. As Barbara Roggema points out in her study of the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, the monk merely sought to reduce the number of crosses in churches to one. In the Byzantine context, cross veneration was promoted as a means for curbing devotion to icons. The *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* does not discuss images at all. Baḥīrā's concern is clearly centred on the cross, not on the presence or absence of icons. Therefore, as Roggema concludes, an answer to the monk's seemingly peculiar message may lie 'closer to home' among Eastern Christian communities living in Islamic contexts, not in Byzantine contexts.[22]

Moving to the context of Eastern Christian communities then, one might surmise that the monk's view of crosses may reflect the aniconic tendencies of some Eastern Christian traditions, West-Syrian communities in particular. But as we pointed out with regards to Abū Rā'iṭah's liturgical context, evidence regarding aniconic preferences is not

consistent. How, then, might the context of Eastern Christian–Muslim disputation regarding the cross impinge upon the monk's message? As we have seen, in light of the general Muslim response to the symbol of the cross – it was not only a widely used liturgical symbol, but a symbol of opposing military and empire as well – Christians were forced to develop an apologetic for the cross, their most precious symbol and their veneration of it. They had to explain the nature of their posture towards it in worship, how it functioned as a symbol and what that symbol meant for them theologically. Perhaps the monk in the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* is providing this kind of innovative apologetic. If this was the case, then, as Roggema argues, 'he is depicted as approaching the veneration of the cross in a more profound manner than his fellow believers'.[23] Where other Christians supported an abundance of crosses, the monk chooses to emphasise a single cross, not because he hated it or wished to downplay its importance, but because he wished to imbue it with special honour in a context where the nature of its identity was contested.

This brings us back to Abū Rā'iṭah and his seemingly peculiar emphasis upon a wooden cross (an emphasis, it is important to state again, he shares in similar ways with the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* and in quite specific ways with the legend's West-Syrian recension, a tradition of which Abū Rā'iṭah was a part). Perhaps Abū Rā'iṭah attempts to emphasise the wood of the cross in order to emphasise the cross's inherent despised form as opposed to what an embellished cross might emphasise. In this, he might be, to use Roggema's words, 'depicted as approaching the veneration of the cross in a more profound manner than his fellow believers' by trying to find a way to imbue it with special honour. Thus, in a context where the cross could be easily misunderstood, Abū Rā'iṭāh applies to it an innovative apologetic meant to emphasise its status as a symbol of monotheistic worship.

Abū Rā'iṭah's attempt at innovative apologetic may not, in the end, be the most effective argument. By focusing on a wood-only cross and dismissing other kinds, might he not end up diminishing the importance of the cross as a symbol instead of expanding it? We cannot be sure, though the response offered by other authors – crosses could be made out of many materials without suggesting idolatry and this in turn promoted its necessity as a Christian symbol – is the more common one. Perhaps this is some indication of the latter argument's effectiveness.

In either case, each of the authors, Abū Rā'iṭah included, shares the same concern: they are attempting to justify their veneration of the cross in contexts where the sin of *shirk* and the accusation of idolatry weigh heavily.[24] Thus, Abū Rā'iṭah, like the other Christian authors, intends to distance Christians and their practice of cross veneration from idolatry and polytheism.

Interestingly, while Abū Rā'iṭah's reasoning may avoid in his mind the Muslim accusation of idolatry, and while it may allow him to imbue special honour to the cross by emphasising its inherently despised form, the argument leaves open the door to another common Muslim concern. Why do Christians effectively dishonour Christ by associating him with the shame and contempt of the cross, a tool of execution? Other authors we have seen attempt to address this concern by establishing the counterintuitive function of the cross in Christian theology. Through its shame, weakness and defeat, Christ obtained honour, strength and victory. In turn, the cross was worthy of veneration even though it was a despised form. As we point out above, while Abū Rā'iṭah seems to acknowledge this Muslim concern – he admits that '[the cross] is especially contemptible' – he does not address the matter further like other authors. He does raise the paradoxicality of Christian faith – a crucified man is the religion's centre, not the pursuit of desirable goods – but this is not directly connected by Abū Rā'iṭah to cross veneration. Abū Rā'iṭah seems content to focus on the concern over idolatry. Hence, even though his argument is unique, especially in light of how many other authors approached the topic, one wonders again how effective it ultimately might have been in an Islamic context where Muslims were concerned to protect the honour of prophets.

In any case, if exalting the cross was not an act of idolatry, how then, one might wonder in the context of Abū Rā'iṭah's argument, did crosses function in Christian worship, whether or not they were aniconic or unembellished? Why do Christians venerate it? The answer to these questions lay in Abū Rā'iṭah's other innovative justification for cross veneration. The reason that Christians exalt the cross and 'turn [themselves] to this form' is because, Abū Rā'iṭah explains, 'it has become for us a *qiblah*, and something particular apart from all other things'.[25] The last portion of this statement is significant: the cross, despite its austerity or connections to contempt, was indispensable to Christian worship. It was so, more importantly, because it was the Christian *qiblah*.

Of course, the *qiblah* normally indicates the Muslim direction of prayer. In the Qur'ān, God commands Moses and Aaron to make their houses face the *qiblah* (10:87). Similarly, in most mosques the *qiblah* is signified by a niche (*miḥrāb*) in a wall that orients worshipers and their prayers towards the Ka'bah in Mecca. Abū Rā'iṭah takes this Islamic background and injects into the term *qiblah* Christian meaning. He suggests that, for Christians, the cross marks the metaphorical direction they face in worship.[26] Abū Rā'iṭah continues, arguing that Christians worship God alone, as he has been revealed in the incarnate Christ. God has 'delivered us from worship of [everything that is] other than God'.[27] In other words, the cross as *qiblah* has a magnetism that pulls those who honour it away from idolatrous distractions and focuses them on true worship.

Indeed, as Abū Rā'iṭah goes on,

> For how is it possible that the one who turns his face toward worship of his Lord be oriented to a *qiblah* other than His *qiblah?* Now the cross is for us a *qiblah* and a glorious [thing], deserving of exaltation and honor and devotion, and who takes up [this] *qiblah*, apart from [all] other things, is saved.[28]

Implicit in Abū Rā'iṭah's comments here is a comparison between the cross and the Ka'bah in Mecca. Muslims do not worship the Ka'bah. Rather, their *qiblah* simply points them in its direction as a way of orienting their worship towards the one God. In this way, it deserves special honour. Similarly, while Christians do not worship the cross, it deserves their honour since it points them towards Christ, the true object of their worship. The implicit comparison and normally Islamic vocabulary help to explain and contextualise Christian veneration of the cross. Notably, Abū Rā'iṭah refrains from explicit attacks upon Islam or Muslim practice. In his subtle comparison to the Ka'bah he seems to see a marker of monotheistic piety that is similar to what the cross means for Christian worship.

But the remarks following his initial designation of the cross as a *qiblah* are telling. 'God [. . .] has been revealed in His Incarnation', Abū Rā'iṭah says, 'and has delivered us from worship of [everything that is] other than God'.[29] If God has delivered Christians from false worship, as Abū Rā'iṭah claims in this passage, then the Christian *qiblah* must mark

out true worship. After all, the one 'who takes up [the Christian] *qiblah*, apart from [all] other things,' Abū Rāi'ṭah makes rather plain, 'is saved'.[30] Thus, while the *qiblah* helps to explain Christian veneration of the cross, it may also help Abū Rā'iṭah to accuse Muslims in a very subtle way of facing the incorrect direction, as it were, when they worshiped.[31] At the very least, these remarks help Abū Rā'iṭah to push back further against the Muslim accusation of idolatry, for the cross is understood to be the only object Christians turn to in their worship of the one God. Hence, he is able to declare in the concluding statement of his argument concerning cross veneration, 'We, the Christian community, worship our Lord and our God, and do not worship another god from among creatures'.[32]

In later centuries, other authors take up Abū Rā'iṭah's argument regarding the cross as a Christian *qiblah*. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī remarks that Christian veneration of the cross is not unlike Muslim veneration of the text of the Qur'ān. This comparison allows Bar Ṣalībī to point out that Christians 'also venerate the cross because it is our *qiblah*'.[33] In the twelfth century, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, a Christian convert to Islam, thinks of his former co-religionists when he writes, 'You worship a cross of metal or wood like you worship the Messiah; you put it on an elevated stand (*minbar*) in the direction of your prayer (*qiblah*), on fine cloth, and have a group of priests serve it'.[34] Again, the cross is designated as a *qiblah*. Even the stand on which a cross might be placed in liturgical contexts is given an Islamic description: *minbar*. Of course, this term and its root (*n-b-r*) can generically indicate something that is high or elevated, but the usage restricted to communal proclamations was introduced during the time of Muḥammad and quickly came to be used to refer to an elevated stand, or something like a pulpit when in mosques, from which a sermon (*khuṭbah*) or other address could be given to the community.[35] Thus, the term took on its own kind of liturgical specificity in much the same way that *qiblah* came to be used primarily of the Muslim direction of prayer. It would seem, then, that Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā imbues the elevated stand with liturgical value as part of what marks the cross out as on object related to Christian worship. Finally, in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, the East-Syrian 'Abdisho' of Nisibis (Bar Brikhā) took up the topic of cross veneration in his *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* (*The Fundamentals of Religion*). Like Abū Rā'iṭah, he mentions that Christians have chosen the cross as their *qiblah*.[36]

As we have said, applying this kind of language to the cross helps to explain its function in Christian liturgical contexts in a way that makes sense in Islamic milieus. This kind of rhetorical move is highly innovative, but, perhaps more importantly, it rather imaginatively dramatises the act of veneration. For when Christians venerated the cross, and more specifically, prostrated themselves towards it in prayer, they were turning their bodies in a specific direction, a *qiblah*, so that they might worship the one represented by the cross. This was a rather innovative way of explaining and defending Christian veneration of the cross.

The Cross is Christ's Proxy on Earth

Abū Rā'iṭah goes on to make some more innovative remarks about the cross in the context of his explanation for why Christians venerate it. Just before his discussion of the cross as a Christian *qiblah*, he boldly states that the cross is:

> [Christ's] sure sign upon the earth, which one who intends to worship him manifestly believes in, and hopes for His return to the earth in the end [times] with honor and esteem as He truly promised when He said through His evangelists that: 'There they shall see My sign preceding before Me when I return in the end [times] together with My armies and My angels' (cf. Matthew 24:30). O what a terrifying fear this is for the clear enemy and his rebellious soldiers because it exposes them and puts them into flight! And he and his soldiers will never cease to beware and be fearful.[37]

According to Abū Rā'iṭah, the 'sure sign upon the earth' is the cross of Christ. Much more, however, Abū Rā'iṭah situates this sign in an eschatological context where the cross precedes Christ's second coming.[38] Here, the cross stands as a powerful symbol to Satan, whom Abū Rā'iṭah refers to in Qur'ānic fashion as the 'clear enemy' (*lil'adū al-mubīn*).[39] In this way, the cross is a sign of the victorious Christ. As we have seen, it signifies true worship and acts as a means for orienting Christians toward Christ. And in Abū Rā'iṭah's text it now also functions as a kind of placeholder for Christ until he returns before

the eyes of both those who look to him in hope and in fear. In short, Abū Rā'iṭah seems to suggest that the cross is Christ's proxy on earth until he returns.

Abū Rā'iṭah's use and understanding of Matthew 24:30 are significant, but the passage had a long history of interesting interpretation. For some early Christians, such as Lactantius in the fourth century, the sign referred to by Matthew would be a sword and would indicate the coming of a holy warrior.[40] But for many others, Christ's sign was generally interpreted as the cross.[41] In fact, the notion of the reappearance of the cross at the final judgement of Christ played a major role in early Eastern Christian communities, even to the degree that the cross was thought by some to have gone up with Christ at his ascension.[42] Of course, such a tradition would be thwarted by another opposing tradition that developed when Helena, Constantine's mother, claimed to find the true cross. There would be little need for the idea of an ascended cross in a Christianised world where the true cross, or fragments thereof, could be honoured on earth.[43] But for Christian communities who did not enjoy religious hegemony, the tradition that the cross ascended to heaven with Christ could offer hope. Perhaps it was with this in mind that further traditions developed whereby Christ would return hanging on the transfigured cross.[44]

Did Abū Rā'iṭah have traditions like these in mind? We can do no more than speculate on the matter, but such a tradition could be put into unique service in an Islamic context. According to Islamic tradition, Jesus returns to earth as a judge in order to 'break the cross',[45] a particularly significant action given the general Muslim antipathy of the cross and their rejection of its theological necessity. The notion that the cross of Christ remained on earth as his proxy and functioned as a sign preceding his victorious return where he would not come to break crosses but vindicate his followers, would, therefore, nourish hope among Christians and subvert the dominant Muslim eschatological narrative.

The East-Syrian Isho'yahb bar Malkon also comments in the early thirteenth century on the nature of the cross as a kind of proxy for Christ. In his defence of cross veneration, he makes use of the standard passages referring to Moses, Joshua and David who worshiped God when they venerated the Ark of the Covenant. Hence, like the Israelites who worshiped God, not the wood of the Ark, so Christians worship God, not the wood of the cross. In the context of this argument, Bar Malkon

employs another example from the Old Testament as an illustration in support of a similar point. '[Jacob] did the same', Bar Malkon notes, 'when they brought him the blood-stained tunic of Joseph. He pressed it against himself and consoled himself with it. And, thanks to the tunic, his eyes were opened and he supported the pains of grief'.[46] The tunic took the place of Joseph in his absence. So it was for Bar Malkon with the cross. As he explains,

> we exalt the wood on which was shed the blood of Christ, and comparable matters, and we console ourselves with them and support the difficulties of this world *until Christ returns at his second coming* as king over the world and the Kingdom and makes us share in His heavenly kingdom, in the same way as Jacob saw Joseph as King over Egypt [. . .] (emphasis added).[47]

Here again, the cross stands in for Christ in his absence and is an object by which Christians remember Christ until he comes again.

'Abdisho' of Nisibis may take the connections between Christ and his cross further by seemingly equating them. In his *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, as we have noted, he conceives of the cross, like Abū Rā'iṭah, as a Christian *qiblah*. This designation was justifiable for Christians because, according to 'Abdisho''s argument, the Arabic word for cross, *ṣalīb*, expresses the same meaning of the Syriac word for cross and crucified one, *ṣlibā*.[48] Thus, it is Christ himself, not simply the object of the cross, who guides the direction of Christian worship.

One might wonder if 'Abdisho' means to equate Christ and the cross here or if he is simply making an argument about the true object of Christians' worship when they prostrated themselves before the cross. He may also simply bring to the foreground a common understanding of religious symbols whereby Christ could be understood to be present in the cross because it was his symbol. We cannot speak for 'Abdisho' on this point, but the author of a much earlier Melkite text is more explicit. *Al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* (*The Compilations of the Aspects of the Faith*), a text Sidney Griffith has called the *Summa theologiae Arabica* because of its wide-ranging treatment of Christian theology, was written in the late ninth century, perhaps before 877. This text is important for our study and we will return to its more significant features below, pausing here to note the ways in which its author argues

that, prior to the ascension, Christ left behind the cross for his followers as a substitute for himself. With this point in mind, the author writes that, 'the cross is Christ our Lord in his body' and, as a result, '[Christian] prostration before the cross is like our prostration to Christ our Lord'.[49] Therefore, the cross resides as Christ on earth, facing his people as they are gathered in worship, and given much of the same dignity, according to the author, as the bread and wine of the Eucharist are Christ's body and blood and the Gospel is his word.[50] Here, of course, the author is thinking in particular of the cross as it figures in liturgical contexts and likely of an aniconic cross,[51] but his conception of it as a proxy for Christ on earth, indeed as the very body of Christ truly present, is rather explicit.

The author's remarks seem to move beyond the close relationship between symbol and symbolised that was understood by many Eastern Christians. Indeed, the transformation in *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* of the cross from a symbol and worship aid to a sacramental object is intriguing. The move could be related to the author's context and his text's purpose. Again, we will return to the text's occasion below, but suffice it to say here that there were those among the author's Christian community who were beginning to forsake some of the distinctives of their faith in favour of Islamic ways of speaking. For example, the author claims that some of these wayward Christians

> maintain that [Christ our Lord] is a messenger like one of the messengers; they do not favor him in any way over them, save in the pardon he brought and in the taking of precedence. They are not concerned to go to church, nor do they do any of the things which Christians do in their churches. Openly declaring themselves to be in opposition to the trinity of the oneness of God and His incarnation, they disparage the messengers, the fathers, and the teachers of the New Testament. They say, 'What compels us to say "Father", "Son", and "Spirit", and to maintain that the Messiah is God? We are content with that with which the Israelites were content, God is one (Deut. 6:4). We have no need for the hypostases, nor for what mere human beings deem impermissible'.[52]

From this passage it would seem that some Christians known to the author had assimilated enough features from Islam to make them quasi-

Muslims. They were distant from other Christians and churches and Christ was little more to them than another messenger from God. They did not even conceive of God as a Trinity in unity and had no need for the two natures of Christ. They were even comfortable, the author suggests elsewhere, with making part of the *shahādah*, the Islamic creed, their own, either as a part of their assimilation or for the sake of concealing their Christian identity in the presence of Muslims. The author's response to this dilemma is strong condemnation along with a lengthy rehearsal of Christian orthodoxy. His argument that Christ was present in the cross makes these Christians' rejection of Christian practice all the more condemning. Perhaps he links the cross with Christ in this way as a means of communicating the severity of these wayward Christians' rejection.

Beyond this cultural context, however, there is a wider literary context to consider. The Council of Trullo in 692 (Quinisext Council) set out the terms in which allegorical images were to be rejected in favour of those that were direct, anthropomorphic symbols of the figures they depicted. Like defences of icons in general, this move was substantiated in light of Christ's incarnation – because God became man, Christ could be depicted.[53] Instead of representing Christ allegorically as a lamb, then, he was to be depicted in his human form. By codifying the manner in which he could be depicted, the Council of 692 hoped to instruct worshipers concerning the power of visual form, 'a power contingent', Ernst Kitzinger argued, 'upon its being a direct reflection of (as distinct from an allusion to) its prototype'.[54] In turn, it was not long before images of Christ were thought of not only as reminders of the incarnation, but as extensions or re-enactments of it.[55] In time, icons became not just a means by which the incarnation was demonstrated as a historical event, but 'as a living and perpetual presence' as well.[56] Beyond a relationship between symbol and symbolised, an image in this sense could re-enact the prototype it symbolised. Hence, there is a transformation of Christian images, noticeable in the seventh century, from 'purely didactic' objects to 'sacramental' ones that are understood in terms very much like the consecrated elements of the Eucharist are sacramentally understood to be Christ's body and blood.[57]

The notion of an icon as a kind of re-enactment is apparent even earlier, perhaps in the sixth century, with respect to icons not made with human hands (*acheiropoiētos*). These miraculous images, such as the

Mandylion (the Image of Edessa, a piece of cloth that allegedly comprised the imprint of Jesus' face)[58] dramatised the idea of a re-enacted incarnation.[59] Further, this close connection with an image and its prototype could work to substantiate the belief that an image had inherent, miraculous power.[60] This idea can be traced back to *Adversus Judaeos* literature from Leontius who argues that the Holy Spirit indwells images[61] and can be seen in a passage from another *Adversus Judaeos* text where those who refuse to venerate the cross and icons are asked to account for the objects' miraculous power.[62]

Like icons of Christ, then, the cross could be conceived as a re-enactment of the incarnation. In this way, it could be argued that Christ was, or at least was present in, the cross. Further, the presence of Christ in the cross was the logical extension of the cross's inherent power. By the ninth century, when *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān* was likely written, there was already a tradition of imputing sacramental presence to Christian images. With this in mind, perhaps the author drew from this tradition in his effort to shake his fellow-Christians from the rather slipshod posture they took towards their faith.

In sum, the cross was, in various ways for each of these authors, an earthly proxy for Christ. For Abū Rāʾiṭah, and in similar ways for Isho'yahb bar Malkon, the cross was a sign preceding Christ's second coming and standing in for him until his return. For the author of *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān* Christ was somehow present in the cross, making him present on earth until he came again in bodily glory.

Venerating the Sign of the Cross is the Distinguishing Mark of Christian Communities

In many ways, these authors' arguments – that the cross should be imbued with special honour, that it was the Christian *qiblah*, and that it was Christ's proxy on earth – are best understood when read in the context of literary efforts to maintain the religious distinctiveness of Christian communities living in Islamic milieus. This seems especially true for the author of *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān* and his apparent distaste for Christians who were willing to let Islam influence too heavily the expression of their faith. This context reveals some of the treatise's more significant features for our study. According to the author, such Christians

> hide their faith, and they divulge to [Muslims] what suits them [. . .] They stray off the road which leads its people to the kingdom of heaven, in flight from testifying (*tashahhud*) to the doctrine of the Trinity of the unity of God and His incarnation, because of what strangers say in reproach to them [. . .] [They are] the hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*) among us, marked with our mark, standing in our congregation, contradicting our faith, forfeiters of themselves (*al-khāsirīn*), who are Christians in name only.[63]

It is clear from the author's condemnation that he is familiar with the Qur'ān. The Christians he opposes are called *munāfiqīn* – religious hypocrites or apostates – a group that is dealt with harshly in the Qur'ān (e.g., 8:49; 9:67). He even calls them *al-khāsirīn*, a term the Qur'ān reserves for sinful 'losers' (e.g., 5:30; 7:23). This familiarity with the religious thought-forms and categories of Islam typifies the author's apologetic approach and the essential function of his text. As Griffith summarises, the author 'intends to prove the doctrinal claims of Melkite orthodoxy in the very language of the religious culture whose social success had done most to subvert the clear statement of orthodox doctrines in the first place'.[64]

There was a fine line, then, between the kind of cultural and linguistic accommodation that could shape a text written by an Arabic-speaking Christian in an Islamic milieu on the one hand and the religious accommodation that could muddle the distinctives between Christian orthodoxy and Islam on the other. This latter concern takes us to the heart of *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān*. As we have seen, certain Christians in the author's community were abandoning or concealing the distinctives of their faith in response to Islamic influence. Perhaps there were times when they did this unknowingly given the extent of their cultural accommodation or the many religious similarities between Christianity and Islam. At other times, as the author makes clear, they made these accommodations willingly, hoping to benefit from the social advancement that a closer affinity with Muslims and Islam might allow, or simply to avoid Muslim antagonism.[65] In either case, such hasty accommodations, according to the author of *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān*, made these Christians hypocrites and religious losers.

In response, the author is keen to point out that 'None of the ways by which people may be led to belief in the Trinity of the unity of God, and

His incarnation, should be neglected'.[66] As a result, the author's text is a catechetical tool his Christian community was meant to consult.[67] This effort frames much of the author's text, but he also urges his readers to maintain certain practices that would help to mark them out, despite their assimilation of Arabic and Islamic thought forms, as distinctly Christian. For example, he instructs them to always make the sign of the cross when they pray, whether or not they were in church. This advice was intended by the author to help distinguish Christian practices and claims from Islamic ones. In a context where members from different religious communities prayed, the act of crossing oneself would be a simple but effective means for asserting religious identity and distinguishing Christian prayer from Muslim prayer.[68]

One need only refer to the experience of 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Najrānī and the ninth-century hagiographical account of his martyrdom to underscore this point. 'Abd al-Masīḥ was a Christian who, at twenty years old, wished to go to Jerusalem in order to pray. He fell in with a group of Muslim raiders on his way and joined them in their battles and prayers. He eventually converted to Islam. After some time, he repented, returned to Christianity and made public his apostasy from Islam. As a result, he was martyred.[69] One of the main points of the text was to emphasise the availability of repentance for Christians who converted to Islam and, by extension, that such conversions were not uncommon in contexts where the absence of distinctive marks meant that the lines distinguishing one religion from the other were blurred.[70] In a very similar way, the sign of the cross could be just this kind of distinguishing mark and the author of *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* was keen to emphasise it as such.[71]

Similarly, the author of *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* argues that Christians ought to confess a fully Trinitarian statement – God is 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' – instead of simply that 'Christ is God, but God is not Christ'. This latter statement appears to be a slight nod to the Qur'ān (5:17) where disbelievers are those who say that God is Christ.[72] This partly Qur'ānic, partly Trinitarian statement would be an example of 'divulge[ing] to [Muslims] what suits [hypocritical Christians]'.[73] This was the kind of thing the author of *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* abhorred, for it was a slight twist of language that could be confusing, or worse, a devious twist of doctrine that made the difference between a practising Christian and a Christian 'in name only'.

It is in these frameworks – that Christians should adhere to the practices that distinguished them from Muslims and that the cross was one of those distinguishing marks – that we must read the author's explanations for why Christians venerate the cross. Like other explanations, we read in *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān* that Christians do not worship the cross, but give it honour for what Christ achieved and offered to his followers through it.[74] '[It was] in the cross', the author declares, 'that the friends of God boasted, and in it was their triumph'.[75] For this reason, worshipers ought to stand before the cross (he calls it the Christians' *qiblah*[76]) in order to meditate upon Christ's work upon it 'and to aspire in [their] thought toward Christ our Lord as though he were crucified before [them]'.[77] Such a practice, in theory, can hardly be different, the author adds, than Muslim veneration of the Black Stone of the Kaʿbah. Furthermore, the author argues that the cross is also a source of power over Satan. In fact, it had the ironic power of mocking Satan since the very device through which he hoped to destroy Christ became the source of his defeat.[78]

These points – not one of them surprising – are taken together to demonstrate that the cross, though it might be scandalous in a Muslim context, is meant to set Christian prayer apart as distinct. Besides making its sign over their bodies in prayer, worshipers were also to use it as a focal point, looking through it 'toward Christ [. . .] as though he were crucified before [them]'.[79] So it was for the doctrine for which the cross is a symbol, namely that Christ, the one whom Christians confess as God, died, rose and ascended was something Christians testified and was unique to their religious confession.[80] Their veneration of the cross was a witness to their testimony and, most importantly for the author of *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān*, distinguished Christian communities from other religious communities that had similar, though competing, truth claims. Thus, to abstain from venerating the cross, making the sign of the cross, or even attempting to hide Christian doctrine behind Qur'ānic phrases (quite different than articulating Christian distinctives in the language of Islam) was analogous to abandoning the central doctrines of Christianity. Venerating the cross and making its sign over one's body, then, kept one from hypocrisy, apostasy and religious loss. In short, those who venerated the cross were friends of God. In this way, the author of *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān* situates the cross in his community as a

crisis point. Rejecting the cross and what it meant was to lose everything that was most important.

With this point we can return to two authors. Returning to Theodore Abū Qurrah, who we focused on in Chapter 1, argues a very similar point in *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*. For Abū Qurrah, Christians should not refrain from their devotion to icons and crosses because in maintaining their devotion they act 'graciously towards Christ, and they deserve the best reward from him'. When they are questioned for their devotion – on this point Abū Qurrah reflects the common Muslim concern that Christians adore a crucified, and therefore shamed, Christ – Christians ought rightly to 'say at the top of our voices, "Yes indeed, he [i.e., Christ crucified depicted on an icon] is our savior, our hope and our joy"'.[81] In this way, the cross and images of Christ become paradoxical crisis points, demanding a response of allegiance from those who follow Christ.[82]

Returning to Abū Rā'iṭah in the early ninth century, we find a similar emphasis upon religious distinction in his reflection on how the Christian *qiblah* – the cross – marks out the Christian community as distinct among other religious communities. To begin with, Abū Rā'iṭah states outright that the person 'who takes up [this] *qiblah*, apart from [all] other things, is saved'. He then distinguishes the Christian community, noting that it worships God alone. It could only be otherwise, after all, if one is 'oriented to a *qiblah* other than [God's] *qiblah*'.[83]

This notion of the cross as a *qiblah* that distinguishes the true worshipers of God has a larger literary context in Abū Rā'iṭah's *Fī ithbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyyah wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-muqaddas*. Much earlier in this treatise, he turns to the life of Moses – an exegetical move that we should expect by now – and the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt. According to Abū Rā'iṭah's retelling of the biblical account, Moses pled with God, asking him (in rather Qur'ānic language) 'to reveal to [the Israelites] His religion and send down (*ānzāla*) to them His book with His practices (*sunan*) and His law (*sharā'i'*)'.[84] God did this by freeing his people '[t]hrough signs' in which '[God] affirmed His religion and confession of it'.[85] In intriguing typology reminiscent of the authors discussed in Chapter 3, 'this [occurred]', according to Abū Rā'iṭah, 'because the staff [of Moses] bore the greatest *mysterion* of the staff which was to come in the Cross [. . .] For this is the customary practice (*sunnah*) of God, from the first to the last [peoples], in the establishment of His

religion and erecting His banner (*'alam*) and affirming His proof for His creation'.[86] In short, God's sign was the cross, the standard (*'alam*) he raised when he established Christianity as the one true religion.[87]

In a very similar way, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī claims that it is by the Christian *qiblah* that [Christians] 'are distinguished from Jews and pagans who do not venerate [the cross]'.[88] He leaves Muslims out of this distinction – the statement occurs within a larger passage where Christian veneration of the cross is compared to Muslim veneration of the text of the Qur'ān and the Ka'bah in a markedly irenic fashion. But Bar Ṣalībī's argument still uses the notion of the cross as a *qiblah*, and the corresponding veneration offered to it, in order to make plain that this *qiblah* marks out the Christian community as religiously distinct. Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā uses similar language. After describing in great detail the ways in which Christian priests honour the cross in liturgical contexts, he remarks that the 'whole community is thus brought to serve [the cross] in the same manner, and they kiss it and the ground before it'.[89] The Christian community, unlike other religious communities, is marked out by its posture, quite literally, towards the cross.

But perhaps most important, returning to Abū Rā'iṭah again, is his remark about the cross as Christ's 'sure sign upon the earth' that precedes Christ's second coming and his reference to Matthew 24:30 that helps him make this point.[90] This very same idea can be read nearly a century before in one of the earliest apologies for Christian doctrine to appear in Arabic and to come from an Islamic milieu. In the *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (*On the Triune Nature of God*), written in perhaps 755 or 788, the author references the very same passage in the Gospel of Matthew and explains:

> The sole sign of Christ is His cross, by which He overthrew the Devil and destroyed his authority; and for His friends He has made it a sign by which they are known by all the people. By my life, all the people of the folk of the earth have learned that the Christians have no sign except the cross, by which we are known both [here] on earth and by Christ on the Day of Resurrection.[91]

The author is rather explicit here, asserting that Christians are known by the cross. By this designation, they are the friends of God. This distinction is particularly interesting in light of a similar Islamic

tradition. Like the description from Abū Rā'iṭah and the author of the *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*, in the Islamic tradition Jesus returns to earth as a judge. But as we have already observed, unlike the Christian authors, in the Islamic tradition Jesus returns to 'break the cross'.[92] The expectation for Christians was entirely different since the return of Christ would not mark their defeat and the destruction of their sign. Instead, the sign of Christ would mark his (and their) victory.[93]

Moving forward to 1231, Jacob bar Shakkō, a West-Syrian titular bishop, writes in his *Ktābā d-simātā* (*Book of Treasures*) that Christ would return to earth and use the cross as Christianity's true sign against the infidels.[94] Again, there would be no breaking of crosses for Bak Shakkō. Instead, it would be Christian communities made distinct by the triumph of their sign. Hence, it was the cross that distinguished the Christian life. This life began under the sign of the cross at baptism and continued with prayers offered with the same sign. These prayers, moreover, were focused on the cross as an aid in Christian worship.[95] For these reasons, venerating the cross was an indispensable act, according to these authors, for Christian communities living in Islamic milieus. The practice not only made them distinct from other religious communities, but it solidified their adherence to Christian faith in a context where the competing truth claims of those who ruled could be a temptation.

Conclusion

Arising out of the explanations for cross veneration that are examined in this chapter are some of the most innovative arguments we have encountered in our study. To be true, these authors cover much of the same ground that we have seen in previous chapters, but they also offer rather unique reflections on why the cross is venerated by Christians and how this practice functions in the context of Christian worship and identity.

For Abū Rā'iṭah, honouring the cross meant honouring a wooden cross. His assertion is unlike any of the arguments employed by other others justifying their veneration of the cross. It seems that Abū Rā'iṭah intended his stipulation for wooden crosses to imbue the Christian symbol with special honour so that it could aptly emphasise monotheism in a context of idolatrous accusations. It is not evident how effective Abū Rā'iṭah's

argument was, but his other justification for veneration, that the cross of Christ was the Christian *qiblah*, was powerfully innovative. It allowed Abū Rā'iṭah, and the other authors who picked the argument up, to contextualise the Christian practice of cross veneration for their Islamic contexts. In this way, veneration of the cross could be described in much the same way as Muslim practices such as facing and venerating the Black Stone of the Ka'bah in Mecca.

This was not Abū Rā'iṭah's only innovative argument arising out of a defence for cross veneration. He also argued that the cross was Christ's sign on earth and preceded his second coming. Other authors, too, made a similar argument. The author of *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* even asserted that Christ was somehow present in the cross. It was his proxy on earth. As such, it stood in for Christ and was worthy of his people's veneration.

Perhaps most importantly, each of these arguments functioned as means for distinguishing Christian communities from non-Christian ones. In contexts where language and thought-forms, not to mention aspects of doctrine and practice, were quite similar, it was the cross that made Christians unique. In contexts where religious communities faced certain directions and certain objects in worship, Christian communities were distinguished as the ones who faced the cross. Their *qiblah* was the cross. They were the ones who made the sign of the cross when they prayed. At the return of Christ, it would be the symbol of Christian communities that would signify victory and judgement, not crushing defeat. In short, in multi-religious contexts, venerating the cross was an indispensable act to the Christian life. The cross of Christ made the difference.

CONCLUSION

A EULOGY FOR THE LIFE OF A THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL IDEA

Having come from at least the eighth century up through the fourteenth century, all that remains is to draw together the threads left by our examination of a great many medieval texts. The best way of doing this may be to consider the topics these authors have raised by way of two final texts. These two treatises – the anonymous *Drāshā da-hwā l-ḥad men Ṭayyāyē ʿam iḥidyā ḥad b-ʿumrā d-Bēt Ḥālē* (*The Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable*) from the early eighth century and Peter of Bayt Ra's' late ninth- or early tenth-century *Kitāb al-burhān* (*The Proof*) – help to summarise this book's two main goals: to tell the story of cross veneration as a theological and political idea in medieval Islamic milieus and to situate the function of this idea as an attempt to define Christian religious identity.

Defending and Explaining Christian Veneration of the Cross in Islamic Milieus

In the early eighth century there appears an account of a disputation between an anonymous East-Syrian monk and an anonymous notable Muslim in the entourage of Maslama ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 738). It is possibly the earliest account of an exchange between Christians and Muslims that includes a discussion on the topic of cross veneration.[1] Like many other accounts of disputations, the essential function of this debate was to help those who read about it discern which religion, Islam or Christianity, was the true religion.[2] Since the Muslim is thoroughly

convinced of the monks arguments, offering very little rebuttal that the monk is not able to use to further strengthen his arguments, it is most likely that Christians were meant to read the text. In doing so, they would read about a monk's triumph over Muslim theological concerns and be reassured of the superiority of their faith.

Early on in the debate the Muslim notable asserts that Muslims 'are vigilant' because they follow the 'commandments of Muḥammad and the sacrifices of Abraham'.[3] More importantly, he claims, Muslims 'do not create a son for God, (one) who is visible and passible like us. And also (in) other ways; for we do not worship the cross, or the bones of martyrs, or images as you (do)'.[4] The exchange carries on for a bit when the Muslim asks the monk what he thinks of the prophet Muḥammad. The monk responds that the Prophet was a 'wise and God-fearing man, who freed [Muslims] from the worship of demons, and caused [them] to know the one true God'.[5] This assessment of the Prophet is free of invective and largely appreciative. But when the Muslim asks the monk why Muḥammad, in light of his wisdom, would not have taught his followers about the doctrine of the Trinity, the monk reveals the limited nature of Muḥammad's prophethood. The monk suggests that Muḥammad taught his followers that there was only one, true God, a message he was guided in by Sergius Baḥīrā. However, since early Muslims were 'childlike in knowledge', he withheld the doctrine of the Trinity from them, thinking that they would misunderstand it for polytheism and begin to multiply gods in which to worship.[6] For the monk, Islam was effectively a partially formed Christianity; it brought Arabs beyond idolatry, but stopped short of the fully formed religion found in the revelation of Christ.

This answer leaves the Muslim frustrated and he is perplexed 'that the Creator should replace the worship of carved-idols with the worship of created things'.[7] When the monk agrees, the Muslim repeats his accusation. 'So then, your practice is difficult (to justify), that you worship images, and crosses, and the bones of martyrs!'[8] In other words, if Islam is really only a partially formed monotheism, then how does it differ from Christianity since its followers appear to worship images, crosses and relics? There follows an elaborate defence and justification for Christian devotion to cross veneration, icons and relics of the saints.

When it comes to cross veneration, the monk begins by rooting the practice in the Old Testament. This strategy begins with both figures

acknowledging that the Israelites were consistently chastised for idolatry. Even so, the monk goes on to cite examples where following and worshiping the one, true God involved a certain posture towards images. Among the examples the monk cites is the bronze serpent that Moses erected in the desert. '[A]nyone who was bitten by a snake', the monk explains, 'would be saved when he gazed upon it, so (also) anyone who is wounded by Satan, whenever he draws near, in suffering and remorse, and worships before the cross, he will be saved from Satan, through the aid of the mercy of the Lord of the cross.'[9] This example not only connects cross veneration with ancient practices, but through typological exegesis, the monk is able to find the cross in the Old Testament. The same strategy is employed with respect to Joshua bowing before the Ark of the Covenant. In this case, the Ark is connected with a Christian altar which, when a priest bows upon the altar, provides 'power and aid against the demons who are the enemies of truth'.[10] Many more biblical examples could be cited, the monk claims, and he rests his case that Christians are simply obeying the commands of their Saviour. '[W]e honor the image of the king', he concludes, 'because of the king'.[11]

The Muslim seems to concede the argument in light of the monk's Old Testament exegesis, but asks, 'for what reason do you worship the cross, since [Christ] does not command you (to do so) in his Gospel?'[12] The monk responds by first turning the question back towards Muslims. They, too, follow laws that Muḥammad did not teach. He suggests a few sections in the Qur'ān where such laws might be found, mentioning the *suwar* by name, but offering no further specificity.[13] Instead, he argues that extra-biblical commands are given through the Holy Spirit via the Apostles and Church Fathers.[14] Again, the monk offers nothing specific, turning straightaway to a defence for Christian veneration of the cross. Christians adhere to this practice because it was through the cross that they 'were freed from error, and through it we were delivered from death and Satan'.[15] As proof, the monk offers allusions to the cross from nature. These appear, for example, as the four quarters of the earth and the four elements. Further, 'a bird, unless it carries and depicts [the cross's] likeness, it is unable to fly; and a person, in the stretching out of his hands bears its type'.[16]

From here, the monk moves to the 'cross itself' and elucidates its inherent power. Accordingly, the monk argues that demons are afraid of

the cross and it can heal disease. Through it, Christians are capable of walking on water, entering fire and driving away beasts. By the sign of the cross, brides are blessed and followers of Christ are baptised. Similarly, the miracle of the consecrated elements of the Eucharist and ordination to the priesthood are enacted by the sign of the cross. '[I]n absolute summary', the monk concludes, 'through [the cross] we are at ease and are guarded against all injuries of the body and soul'.[17]

Building on his summary, the monk also offers eschatological reflections, noting that 'on the day when Christ the king manifests himself from heaven the sign of his victory will precede him' and bring shame to those who did not believe in him.[18] The ultimate display of the cross's power, then, was its appearance in the last days, just before Christ's return, and its defeat of the enemies of Christ.[19] In this light, the monk proclaims:

> anyone who is a Christian and does not worship (*sāged*) the cross, and does not gaze upon it as though on Christ, truly he is lost from life. And when we worship the cross, it is not as though we are worshiping the wood, or iron, or bronze, or gold, or silver, but we are worshiping our Lord, God the Word, who dwelt in the temple (received) from us, and (dwells) in this sign of victory.[20]

The cross, according to the monk, defines true worship. The materials from which a cross might be made are meaningless. More important, Christ himself dwells in the cross,[21] so Christians who look to it also look upon Christ and worship in truth. The monk clarifies this in a summary statement where he says, 'all of our worship, whether (directed) towards the icon or towards the cross [. . .] it is Christ [the] Lord whom we worship'.[22] The Muslim finds the monk's explanation satisfactory and at the close of the debate admits that many Muslims would surely convert to Christianity in light of the monk's remarks if it were not for their fear of Muslim rulers and public shame.[23]

By now it will have become clear that the monk's explanation and defence for cross veneration is a helpful summary of the story I have tried to tell in this book because he covers nearly every feature that the other texts mention in their attempts to justify cross veneration. To begin with, the monk briefly turns to Muḥammad and the history of Islam in his effort to explain why scripture does not command certain Christian

practices. The monk's move here is left quite vague – he does not specify which Muslim practices Muḥammad or the Qur'ān fail to mention – but the reference brings to mind a handful of other authors who did make specific remarks. Authors like John of Damascus and 'Ammar al-Basrī deflected Muslim accusations of Christian idolatry through counter-attacks that drew attention to ostensible idolatry in Muslim devotion to the Black Stone of the Ka'bah. In doing so, they lambasted Muslims for failing to recognise the idolatry in their midst before launching false accusations. Other authors like Elias II, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī and Isho'yahb bar Malkon also refer to the Qur'ān, but their references lack invective. Instead, they look at elements of Islam like the Ka'bah or the Qur'ān to help them illustrate that Christians did not worship the cross when they venerated it, but used it as an aid in their worship of Christ.

The monk also briefly explains that the cross was a means by which Christians worshiped Christ. He describes the cross as a symbol, as many of the other authors do, and his explanation draws attention to the way in which the cross functions as a conduit for true worship. By facing the cross and bowing before it, Christians were reminded of Christ's salvific work on the cross. In turn, they worshiped Christ, not the cross or the material from which it was made. Like the great majority of the authors, the monk also compares cross veneration to the honour bestowed upon a king. For the monk, the king's image is deserving of honour because the king himself is deserving of honour. So it was with Christ and the cross.

The monk also attempts to ground cross veneration in ancient scripture. To do so, he turns to the Old Testament, comparing cross veneration to similar examples he finds there. Through typological exegesis, he also locates types of the cross that were prefigured in the Old Testament. Paradigmatic of this strategy was the Ark of the Covenant and Moses and the bronze serpent in the wilderness. For the monk, the Ark of the Covenant was a source of power much like the cross. Other authors referred to the Ark as a means for explaining that Christians bowing before a cross did not indicate that they were worshiping the object of the cross. Likewise, the monk, as well as many of the other authors we looked at, the serpent on the pole that Moses fashioned was a type for the cross and the Israelites' adoration of the pole pre-figured Christian devotion to the cross. In this light, cross veneration was hardly a matter of innovation. Instead, it was a practice with ancient monotheistic roots that Christians carried on in obedience.

For nearly all of the authors, including the monk, the cross itself and the sign of the cross were powerful. It was through the cross that Christ demonstrated his power over sin, death and evil. Likewise, the crosses Christians venerated and the sign they made in the shape of the cross, held sway over Satan and demons, sickness, evil and the enemies of Christ. Through the cross, Christian faith was shown to be superior to other religious symbols and truth claims.

Finally, the monk makes the bold claim that Christ was present in the cross. He makes this statement in more explicit ways than the understanding that there was a relationship between the symbol (the cross) and the symbolised (Christ). Much more, Christ dwells in the cross. It was very much the same for the author of *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān*. Similarly, the monk, as well as the author of the *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*, Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī and Jacob bar Shakkō, makes the cross Christ's sign that would precede his return to earth. At that point, Christ's final eschatological victory would be demonstrated when crosses were not destroyed but instead announced the triumph of those who followed Christ's sign. In an Islamic context where Christ was expected to return to smash crosses, the claim that his victorious return and judgement would be preceded by the sign of the cross was powerfully subversive.

The monk's disputation with the Arab notable, the account of which was written in the early eighth century (perhaps in the 720s), is one of the earliest texts we have looked at in an attempt to tell the story of cross veneration as a theological idea. The disputation demonstrates, in this light, an interesting observation regarding the idea's historical development. The story of cross veneration was not one that developed in a linear, chronological fashion. Not all of the elements present in the monk's remarks are duplicated in all of the other texts. Sometimes arguments were used by later authors that are not seen in earlier texts. So the arguments were not built on top of one another until a full-scale explanation for cross veneration developed. Instead, authors seem to use the arguments that best suit their circumstances and the nature of their texts.

The tradition and historical development that is most clear is the apparent attempt to maintain arguments from the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition.[24] Almost all of the arguments employed by our authors appear in texts from the *Adversus Judaeos* literature. Of course, *Adversus Judaeos*

texts made for obvious resources in countering the Muslim accusation of idolatry because Jews had accused earlier Christian communities of the same thing. So the authors we examine in this book took up the tradition and applied it to their Islamic contexts, often times with very little alteration. In this light, the story of cross veneration as a theological idea can be read as an idea being re-birthed each time the sign of the cross met with Muslim antagonism or Christian apathy. In such cases, defences of cross veneration re-emerge, and with them, a resurgence and re-engagement with the tradition and arguments from earlier periods.

In only a very few cases were fresh ideas applied to the idea of cross veneration. Even some of the more inventive remarks, such as Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's connection between Christians venerating the cross and Muslims venerating the words of the Qur'ān (not the paper, ink or binding), carry with them echoes of the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition (in Bar Ṣalībī's case, his remark is similar to one made by Leontius about the Torah). Other arguments seem truly innovative in the context of an almost unquestioning dependence upon earlier traditions. Some of these innovations appear in the forging of new traditions as in the East- and West-Syrian texts. In these texts, authors develop some new metaphors and new arguments. For example, the designation of the cross as the Christian *qiblah*, as Christ's pre-eschatological sign, or as the sign filled with the presence of Christ all appear and are perpetuated in East-Syrian and West-Syrian texts. In some cases, similar arguments move beyond these confessional boundaries and appear in texts from other traditions like *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān*, a Melkite text where Christ was sacramentally present in the cross in more explicit ways than in other texts.

Besides these relatively few innovations, what are we to make of our authors' dependence upon traditions like the *Adversus Judaeos* literature? Two observations can be made. First, the ways the texts examined in this book mirror the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition suggests that the topic of cross veneration was a perennial concern from very nearly the beginning of Christianity and well into the medieval period.[25] Second, the dependence upon *Adversus Judaeos* literature suggests that Christians who took up defences of cross veneration saw in their Muslim opponents a similar kind of adversary as the Jews.[26] As a result, they turned to the anti-Jewish polemical texts and literature of their forebears and redeployed the same scriptures and arguments.

What is interesting about this last point is that an argument that might function well in a Jewish context may not always function well when transposed with little or no alteration onto an Islamic context. One thinks in particular in this regard of some of the authors' typological exegesis of the Old Testament. Though this strategy might help to substantiate the attachments cross veneration had to antiquity and monotheism, it also introduces a different set of challenges with respect to Muslims who viewed Christian and Jewish scripture as having been corrupted. As one example, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), one of the most prolific Muslim scholars and jurists to emerge from the medieval period, provides lengthy commentary on scriptural corruption (*taḥrīf*). In particular, he devotes a section in his *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* (*The Correct Answer to Those Who Have Changed the Religion of Christ*) to the means by which a previous revelation (i.e., the Torah and the Gospel) can be properly understood.[27] Christian exegesis might surely fall short of how Muslims felt the Old Testament could be used. This underlines the suggestion that Christian communities were the intended readership for many of these texts. They would benefit from seeing the cross in the Old Testament, not necessarily Muslims who might be unconvinced by such a strategy.[28]

In a very similar way, some arguments in the texts we have examined appear in various ways to be downgraded when put to use in Islamic contexts. They become very utilitarian and shed some of the depth that might otherwise be present. One example is the way in which many of the authors refer to the cross as a symbol. The cross represents the events of the crucifixion and the salvation of humankind. For this reason, Christians venerate it. As a symbol, many of the authors are keen to point out, the worship they offer passes through it to its prototype: Christ crucified. The history of theological reflection applied to symbols, especially with respect to the intimate relationship between original and copy, is very much in the background of many of these texts. It would seem, however, to be a rather important nuance to emphasise. A religious symbol, because of the relationship between original and copy that is inherent in the symbol, becomes more than a mere representation. For this reason, religious symbols like the cross were worthy of veneration. Why leave this distinction out of a defence for cross veneration? Including it in an Islamic context could be hazardous for it could easily suggest to Muslims that the cross was Christ and expose Christians to

accusations of *shirk*. Leaving these nuances in the background helped authors to emphasise their main point: they were not worshiping the cross, but rather their worship passed to Christ through it.[29]

Of course, a few of the texts we examined do make explicit the connection between the presence of Christ and the cross. The author of *al-Jami' wuju al-iman* sees Christ present in the cross in an almost sacramental fashion. But in most of the other Christian authors' arguments, these kinds of reflections do not appear or are at least left quietly in the background. It would seem that a complex theological understanding of symbols would be relevant to a defence of why Christians venerated the cross. In these texts, however, the topic had shifted into a new field of debate. With that move, arguments that might normally be included shifted in favour of more direct positions that fit the apologetic concerns of Christian–Muslim discourse. A full Christian understanding of symbols, then, is not on display, for the framework of the debate was re-shaped by Muslim objections.[30]

One area where the Islamic context brought focus was the apparent weakness and shame of the cross. Some of the Christian authors we examined face this accusation squarely. With careful theological reflection and biblical exegesis, East-Syrian authors like Timothy I and Theodore bar Koni argue that the weakness of the cross was Christ's strength and that the apparent shame connected to the cross was the locus of Christ's victory. Paradoxically, it was not a source of shame, but of honour. Christians who participated in Christ's suffering by honouring the cross were also worthy of Christ's honour.

In all of this, Christians who defended cross veneration in Islamic milieus, though many of their texts can be described as theological sourcebooks and compendiums, were not necessarily doing theology proper. Instead, theirs was very much an apologetic task where the field of debate set the agenda. In other words, Islamic contexts shaped the outline for the topics that our authors addressed.[31] Hence, many of the texts address the same lists of topics and when it comes to Christian practices, these included baptism, the Eucharist, the direction of prayer and, of course, cross veneration. This is not to say that all of the texts are the same. Certainly each of the authors is unique, addressing unique audiences, cultures and confessions. Yet their milieus and sources also demonstrate a remarkable continuity in the texts and the concerns authors and their communities faced with regards to how their

religious practices and identities fit within their wider, Islamic environments.

Most striking in this regard is, as Sidney Griffith puts it, the 'obvious intermingling of questions of faith and practice in such a way that it is clear that the shape of theology itself is determined in this milieu by the apologetic imperative to justify religious beliefs in virtue of the public practices they entail'.[32] This helps to explain the depth and nature of the arguments many of our authors employ. But one must also wonder in this regard if the repetition of topics and arguments indicates that cross veneration was a perennial concern or if it was at times perpetuated along with other topics (and if the arguments defending it were perpetuated) in order to ensure that authors' texts conformed to certain literary or rhetorical standards. In other words, if an author needed to write an apology for Christianity in a context where its practices were questioned, would he feel it was required to include a discussion of cross veneration so that his text would meet literary standards? On the one hand, discussions of cross veneration in the first few centuries of our study – certainly between the eighth and tenth centuries – seem to be addressing real, lived concerns. In later centuries, however, discussions seem to be perpetuated merely as topoi of Christian–Muslim apologetic literature. This seems to be particularly the case with the disputations of Jirjī and Gregory of Palamas where cross veneration is almost worked into their debates as a means for covering all of the important topics for those who read the accounts. This is more assuredly the case with texts like the account of Theodore Abū Qurrah's debate with Caliph al-Ma'mūn where only certain manuscripts contain a discussion of cross veneration as if later copyists interpolated the topic among other, more original ones.

In his study of images in Islam and Christianity, Griffith remarks that after the eighth and ninth centuries, 'the topic [of venerating crosses, icons, and relics] receded in importance, to the point that it scarcely ever appears in the later apologetic texts written by Christians, or even in the more polemical ones written by Muslims'. Later centuries see an emphasis upon doctrines like the Trinity and incarnation and Muḥammad's prophethood. 'It seems reasonable to suppose', Griffith concludes on this basis, 'that as a topic of controversy [. . .] veneration of crosses and icons was almost limited to the time when the public display of Christian signs and symbols in the caliphate was a regular feature of

the public landscape'. After this period, 'it is as if the matter had been settled' and the topic of cross veneration barely even appears as a list of differences between Muslim and Christian communities.[33] Griffith's point is well taken insofar as the apologetic texts from the eighth and ninth centuries, especially the Christian ones, demonstrate the greatest frequency in treating cross veneration. But as this study has shown, this period should rightly be extended at least into the tenth century, noting that the topic continues to appear even into the closing periods of the medieval era.

Further, Muslim texts consistently raise concerns over Christian crosses in the period under examination. So it seems that the matter was far from ever being settled in the medieval era. This clarification notwithstanding, the topic of cross veneration does seem to move from a point of lived concern to merely a literary topos that was germane to medieval Christian–Muslim apologetic literature. Perhaps this move is evidence of the topic beginning to fall out of vogue and the shape of theological reflection taking on new forms. In any case, the life of cross veneration as a theological idea, whether as a necessary apologetic or as a literary topos, does not seem to have much of a life outside of the medieval period even as Christian communities continue to exist in contexts where the cross presents a theological challenge.

Cross Veneration and the Cruciformity of Christian Identity

Returning to the early eighth-century disputation with whom we began the Conclusion, the monk makes clear in his closing remarks about cross veneration that that anyone who does not 'gaze upon [the cross] as though on Christ, truly he is lost from life'.[34] For the monk, venerating the cross could be a mark that distinguished communities who worshiped in truth from those who did not. In this way, venerating the cross was a way of shaping the distinctions between Christian communities and non-Christian communities. In other words, it was not just a theological idea, but a political one as well. One final text helps to make this function clearer. In the late ninth or early tenth century, a Melkite named Peter of Bayt Ra's wrote a theological treatise that he titled *Kitāb al-burhān* (*The Proof*). In this text Peter is keen to demonstrate the superior truth claims of Christianity, most frequently

vis-à-vis other Christian traditions but sometimes against Muslim claims. In particular, Peter attempts to establish the antiquity of Christianity in a land that, in his time, was firmly under Muslim control. To put his concern in another way, Peter tries to show his readers the difference Christianity makes for those living under Muslim rule and his discussion of the cross is especially poignant in this regard.

For Peter, the cross was given by Christ 'as an efficacious weapon, effective in fire, air, water and earth; and nothing keeps it back from [operating on] these'.[35] The cross was powerful and its authority extended beyond natural elements to the supernatural world as well. '[He has given us the cross] as a power which nothing can withstand, and from which the devils flee wherever its sign is made'.[36] In this way, the cross was 'Christ's banner', a sign that elicited obedience from those who looked upon it, unless those onlookers had weak faith and were 'very hypocritical and disobedient'.[37]

On this clarification – that only the truly faithful honour the cross of Christ – Peter articulates his vision of Christian identity. What distinguishes the truly faithful followers of God is their shape. 'In every creature', Peter writes, 'there is a representation (or type) of the cross, for him who seeks to know it'.[38] This representation of the cross is discernible in three ways. In the first, the world reflects a cross shape insofar as it is divided into east, west, south and north. This 'cannot be other than a cross, distinctly so shaped'. As Peter goes on, 'the world has length, breadth, height and depth, and that is a cross too'.[39] From the natural world, Peter moves to the spiritual realm, noting the shape of the archangels and seraphim. According to Peter, the wings with which the angels cover their faces are stretched out upward, the wings that cover their feet are stretched downward and the two with which they fly are extended out to the right and to the left. This is 'indeed a correctly-shaped cross', Peter says.[40]

Finally, Peter turns towards humanity:

> When a man stands praying, spreading out his arms towards his Lord, then he is a correctly-shaped cross, because the height of any man [. . .] and [the span of his arms] measure the same [. . .] Man was not created so as to fit the carpenter's wooden cross, but every cross is constructed to correspond to the man who is to be crucified on it. The cross is made according to the man who is to the form of

> man [. . .] because God created him as a perfect created being from four elements and from the four quarters of the world, and everything with four extremities is a cross. Clearly man was created as a cross. For that reason, the Word of God Who created him arranged his salvation by means of the cross. The wooden beams of the cross were only called a cross after the rigidity (*taṣlīb*) of man's created form.[41]

The structure of a cross takes its shape, according to Peter's comments, from humanity. Crosses, after all, were constructed to match the bodies of those who would hang upon them. In this way, the cross is human-shaped; it is a reflection of the ontological shape of men and women as God created them. As Peter notes, the wooden beams, placed in intersecting lines over one other, are only called a cross after the '*taṣlīb* of man's created form'. Here, cross (*ṣalīb*), backbone (*ṣulb*) and the general shape of humanity (*taṣlīb*) come together in a linguistic overlap (the vocabulary sharing *ṣ-l-b* as their root). Peter exploits this relationship in order to argue that humans are essentially cruciform and, therefore, the true followers of God are those who honour Christ by adoring the cross, a reflection of their very ontology. Hence, despite the reshaping of society and doctrine under Muslim rule, the cross was a reminder of life and belief as it was correctly ordered. As such, it was deserving of honour and allegiance.

Peter's discussion of Christian identity here is rather explicit and even literal. In this way, he joins other authors like Abū Rā'iṭah, the author of *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān*, and Bar Ṣalibi who unequivocally mark out Christian communities by their commitments to venerating the cross and making this sign their *qiblah*. But as we have seen, even many of the other Christian authors who wrote to defend cross veneration, either by simply explaining the practice or by deflecting Muslim accusations of idolatry, use their arguments about cross veneration in order to remind their readers of the borders that delineated Christian and Muslim communities. In some cases, venerating the cross was a boundary marker because the practice was connected to distinctive Christian doctrines and beliefs about Christ. But as we have also seen, the sign of the cross was also used politically for the ways it could define Christian space and empire. Even in these cases, communities were marked out by their posture towards the symbol of the cross.

In all of this, venerating the cross became an indispensable act to Christian life. But many of these authors also used the practice to create a crisis, a potential stumbling block for their Christian communities. Would they turn towards the cross, prostrate themselves before it and, through it, worship Christ? Would they do this even though the sign was a scandalous one in Islamic milieus and could be cause for mockery? In this way, venerating the cross helped to make plain the distinctions between Christian communities and the Muslim communities around them. For Christians, venerating the cross pointed the way to adhering to Christian faith in the midst of the growing influence, and growing community, of Islam. Even though these Christian communities adapted their cultural identities by taking on Arabic and Islamic thought forms as a primary means of discourse, remaining cruciform in their worship solidified their religious identity and helped them resist elements of Islam that were not to be absorbed.

APPENDIX I

A SUMMARY OF SOURCES

The main primary sources examined in this book – those apologetic and disputational texts referring to cross veneration and written in Islamic milieus – cover nearly seven hundred years, from the eighth century to the fourteenth century. They originate from locations throughout the eastern Mediterranean and further east as well. The texts have been surveyed in a number of important collections. For Christian texts, these collections include Georg Graf's extensive *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*[1] and, for both Muslim and Christian texts, we can now add the impressive *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History* (*CMR*).[2] This multi-volume collection surveys every known text written by Christians about Islam and by Muslims about Christianity from 600–1900. Readers who are interested in a particular text's treatment of topics other than cross veneration are encouraged to consult these resources for more information.

The purpose of this first appendix is to gather together each of the main texts examined in this study, organise them chronologically, and contextualise each one within its historical and literary setting. In doing so, I will not offer an in-depth analysis of each text. Neither will I reproduce the kinds of summaries that are offered by multi-volume works like *CMR*. Instead, I will sketch for the reader each text's general arguments and function in such a way that the analyses of each author's approach to cross veneration are properly understood. Specialists and readers who might be unfamiliar with this genre of literature can refer to this appendix. Readers may also refer to Appendix II where the present

section is reproduced in an abbreviated form as a table chronologically listing author, language, and date of composition.

***The Letter of Leo III* (in Ghewond)**
Language: Unknown
Date: *c.*eighth century
Author: Unknown

According to Theophanes the Confessor (*c.*760–818), the Muslim caliph 'Umar II composed a letter to the Byzantine emperor Leo III, hoping to convince him to convert to Islam.[3] Other texts also claim that Leo wrote a reply to this letter.[4] In the late eighth or early ninth century, an obscure Armenian priest by the name of Ghewond claims to reproduce the texts of this exchange between 'Umar and Leo in his *History*, a historical account of the interactions between Muslims and Armenians.[5]

Much ambiguity surrounds the claims to authenticity made of these letters.[6] What seems clear at the very least is that a later reviser of Ghewond's *History* interpolated a reconstruction of 'Umar's letter and a form of Leo's reply.[7] But in these letters it also seems apparent that 'Umar was not the one to first initiate the exchange. In fact, he at times seems to be responding to issues posed to him by an earlier letter. In this light, there is evidence for multiple exchanges of letters between the Caliph and the Emperor.[8]

What we have in Ghewond, then, is most likely a representation of a letter written by 'Umar. In it, the Caliph asks a series of questions covering many of the major concerns Muslims had with Christian theology, scripture, and practice. One of these questions focuses on the Christian practice of venerating the cross. 'Umar's questions are represented in Ghewond's text as a kind of list, suggesting that it is a reconstruction of an earlier form of the letter, and Leo writes back with lengthy responses to the Caliph's questions, defending and explaining Christian theology and practice.

Of course, it is perfectly reasonable to believe that 'Umar and Leo exchanged letters in which they discussed one another's religion. As we have it in Ghewond's *History*, however, the representation of 'Umar's and Leo's exchange serves to provide a basis upon which Leo can demonstrate the soundness and superiority of Christian faith and practice.

***Drāshā da-ḥwā l-ḥad men Ṭayyāyē ʿam iḥidyā ḥad b-ʿumrā d-Bēt Ḥālē* (*The Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable*)**
Language: Syriac
Date: *c.*720s
Author: Unknown
The author of this early eighth-century account of a disputation between an unnamed East-Syrian Christian monk and an Arab is one of the earliest surviving examples of Christian disputation among apologetic texts devoted to Islam. It is structured in a 'question-and-answer' format[9] and consists of an Arab notable's challenges to Christian faith and practice. Quotations from each interlocutor cover topics like the Trinity, Christology, the status of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān, and Christian practices like veneration and the direction of prayer.

The debate results with the Arab admitting that if it were not out of fear, many Muslims would convert to Christianity. In this light, the text presents Christianity as superior religious truth. Christian readers of the account could see via the monk's example that they had satisfactory answers to Muslim questions and, as a result, could be confident in their faith. Further, the monk's example might help to stave off the temptation to convert to Islam;[10] if Christians could trump Muslim objections, then they need not bother becoming Muslims despite the political and societal advantages that might come along with conversion.

'De haeresibus' ('On Heresies', chapter 100)
Language: Greek
Date: *c.*mid-eighth century
Author: John of Damascus
John was born in approximately 675 in the city of Damascus to a Melkite Christian family. John's grandfather, Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn, was said to have played a role in surrendering the city of Damascus to Muslim rulers in 635 and his father was one of the Umayyad caliph Muʿāwiyah's (r. 661–680) high-ranking officials.[11] John also played a role in the Muslim government until 'Umar II prohibited non-Muslims from holding such positions unless they converted. In response to this stipulation, John retired to the monastery of Mār Saba near Jerusalem where he died in the mid-eighth century.[12]

One of John's most important works, completed in the mid-eighth century, is his *Pēgē gnōseōs* (*Fount of Knowledge*), a text surveying Christian knowledge. It is divided into three sections, the second of which is titled 'De haeresibus' ('On heresies'). This second section is further divided into 100 chapters, or heresies. The collection is a bit uneven, consisting of chapters devoted to Christian heresies but also otherwise independent religions like Judaism (as well as Jewish sects) and Islam. The chapter John devotes to what he considers the Christian heresy of Islam (he calls this the 'still-prevailing deceptive superstition of the Ishmaelites' [*hē mechri tou nun kratousa laoplanos skeia tōn Ismaēlitōn*]) is chapter 100. As such, Islam marks for John the latest in a long line of heresies that plagued the Church.

Chapter 100 of 'De haeresibus' is the earliest known Christian document to deal with Muslims and focus on Islam in detail. Even more importantly, it served as a source for Christian knowledge about Islam for centuries after John wrote it. In the chapter, John treats Christian theological themes like the Trinity and Christology and devotes large chunks of the chapter to attacking the Prophet Muḥammad, the Qur'ān, and Muslim religious practices. His discussion of Christian practices, the veneration of the cross in particular, appears in the context of his attack on Muslim religious devotion.

Part of John's goal with 'De haeresibus' was to catalogue for his readers deviations from orthodox Christian belief. Many of John's original readers would likely have been fellow Christians living under Muslim rule. In a context of competing claims to religious truth, 'De haeresibus' would situate Islam as a parasitic derivative of Christianity, an amalgam of beliefs that at times borrowed from Christian history and doctrine but was in the end a dangerous heresy. This could only solidify the commitments readers had to Christian identity, as it would for the many later generations of readers who would turn to chapter 100 of 'De haeresibus' for information about Islam.

***Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (*On the Triune Nature of God*)**
Language: Arabic
Date: 755 or 758
Author: Unknown
Nothing is known about the eighth-century author of this text other than he was a Melkite Christian, possibly a priest or monk associated

with a monastery like St Catherine at Mount Sinai (where the text's only manuscript is preserved).

The treatise, as the title given to it by a modern editor suggests, focuses in part on the nature of God as a Trinity in Unity. In fact, the text is far more wide-ranging, discussing, in addition to Trinitarian doctrine, Christological concerns, such as Christ's person and work and his earthly ministry. Clearly evident is the author's familiarity with the Qur'ān and typological exegesis that he applies to biblical texts in order to substantiate his arguments concerning Christ.

The work is significant as one of the earliest known defences of Christian doctrine to be written in Arabic. As such, it has much to say about how Arabic-speaking Christians were encountering the religion of Islam and applying the apologetic strategies of the past to new environments. It may even be the case that the text functioned as a catechetical aid for Christians learning how to rearticulate their faith for an Islamic milieu and how the cross functioned as a sign identifying Christians and their victory in Christ. The author's familiarity with the Qur'ān and passages where he seems to address Muslims directly also make it possible that the text was meant as a defence of Christian doctrine addressed to Muslims.

***Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn*/*Liber scholiorum* (*Book of scholia*)**
Language: Syriac
Date: 791/2
Author: Theodore bar Koni

Theodore bar Koni was an eighth-century East-Syrian Christian from southern Iraq. He was known as a *malpānā* (teacher) and wrote a number of theological texts. All of these have been lost, save one text, his *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn*.

The *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn* is a kind of manual for students and covers biblical and theological topics. Bar Koni devotes his tenth chapter to an apology of East-Syrian Christology and a refutation of a number of Muslim (*ḥanpē*, or 'pagans', in the text)[13] objections. These objections include predictions of Christ in the Old Testament and Christian practices such as baptism, the Eucharist, and cross veneration. The text's manuscripts exist in two separate redactions, one of which appends an extended explanation for cross veneration.

Bar Koni structures his text as a question-and-answer exchange between a master and a student (part of what Sidney Griffith calls the 'Master and his Disciple' genre[14]). And his apology for Christian faith is cast in the form of a Christian teacher answering the questions of a Muslim student. This structure, especially as it appears in the section devoted to Christian apology, gives readers a view of the general landscape of Christian–Muslim debate: what topics were discussed and the kinds of arguments that could be employed. In the case of the *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn*, the debate is rhetorical and the outcome is clear. In the text, the teacher's arguments are so convincing that the Muslim student admits he would convert were it not for tradition. In this way, authors of these kinds of texts were the sole moderators of their artificial debates. Hence, they give ready-made answers to questions and can control the outcome of the debates. Not necessarily a guidebook that students could put to use in authentic debate, works like the *Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn* were mostly convincing to Christian readers and did much to affirm them of their own religious identities in light of some of the prevailing theological objections posed by Muslims.

The Letter of 'Umar II to Leo III
Language: Arabic
Date: *c.*mid-/late eighth century
Author: Unknown

As we have already seen, evidence exists for an exchange of letters between the Umayyad caliph 'Umar II and the Byzantine emperor Leo III. Part of this exchange, or at least a reconstruction of it, is alleged to be preserved in the *History* of Ghewond. Adding to this, two texts exist that may represent at least a form of the letter 'Umar sent to Leo (to which the latter responds, as seen in Ghewond). These two texts exist in separate manuscripts, the first in a sixteenth-century Aljamiado (the use of Arabic script to transcribe a Romance language) manuscript that contains a collection of polemical texts. The second text is found in a ninth- or early tenth-century Arabic manuscript. The first manuscript identifies the names of 'Umar and Leo. The second manuscript does not identify the two men, though the first part of the letter is missing in this manuscript.[15]

Intriguingly, Jean-Marie Gaudeul discovered that these two texts partially overlap: the end of the first manuscript agrees with the beginning of the second manuscript. Even more intriguing, the two manuscripts

match the answers given by Leo (in the letter reproduced by Ghewond). In this light, Gaudeul is able to reconstruct what could be the text of 'Umar's letter to Leo, or at least a version of it.[16] The authenticity of this reconstructed letter remains uncertain. Does Gaudeul's reconstruction represent the actual letter from 'Umar? There are not presently any definitive answers to this question, but it would seem to constitute at least a proximate representation of something 'Umar would have sent to Leo and demonstrates that Christian–Muslim exchanges were sometimes built upon direct responses from one party to another.[17]

The text of this reconstructed letter covers a broad range of objections to Christian beliefs and covers many of the traditional topics of Muslim anti-Christian polemical texts. These topics include objections to Christological claims, attacks upon the authenticity of Christian scripture, and arguments that Christ predicts the Prophet Muḥammad. One section in particular focuses on objectionable Christian practices such as the veneration of relics, images, and the cross. Of course, responses to these objections can be seen in Leo's alleged response in Ghewond's *History*. The fact that such a letter re-appears in later manuscripts suggests that individuals wished to say something about Muslim belief vis-à-vis Christianity and do so in a way that suggested historical and authoritative validity (coming as it did from 'Umar). So, whether or not the reconstructed letter is authentic, it functions in a way that reaffirms Islamic faith.

Maymar qālahu Anbā Thāwudhūrūs usquf Ḥarrān al-muqaddas wa-huwa Abū Qurrah uthbitu fīhi anna l-sujūd li-ṣūrat al-Masīḥ ilāhinā lladhī {. . .}
(*A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*)
Language: Arabic
Date: after 799
Author: Theodore Abū Qurrah
Abū Qurrah wrote this treatise in defence of the Christian practice of venerating icons. Abū Qurrah wrote the treatise at the request of a certain Abba Yannah in Edessa who, it will be recalled, informed him that many Christians were abandoning their practice of icon veneration. In this way, the text provides evidence of the tendency of some Christian communities towards iconophobia and that their fear was at times driven by Muslim criticism.

Abū Qurrah writes to defend not only the place of venerating icons – and he also discusses prostrating before the cross – but also to encourage Christian communities in Edessa to preserve, not abandon, their practice. His text conforms in many ways to the three *Orations* of John of Damascus, but Abū Qurrah also includes references to the Qur'ān and *aḥadīth*. More significantly, however, Abū Qurrah seems keen to suggest that veneration of the cross and icons was, as Griffith puts it, 'part of the Christian witness in the Islamic milieu to the truth of their faith in the divinity of Christ and in the salvation won for them by his death on the cross'.[18] In other words, the cross and icons proclaimed the very doctrinal points that made Christianity distinct from Islam. In turn, bowing before the cross and icons was one way, according to Abū Qurrah, of asserting Christian identity in an Islamic milieu. Those who abandoned the practice, turned away from one of the most significant ways by which they might be appropriately distinguished from the Muslims around them.

Tub dilēh kad dīlēh d-mār Ṭīmātē'ōs qāṭōlīqā drāshā da-'bad lwāt Mahdī 'amīrā da-mhaymānē b-sharbā d-haymānūtā da-kresṭyānūtā ba-znā d-shū'ālā wa-dpūnāy petgāmā
(*Disputation of Patriarch Timothy I with Caliph al-Mahdī*)
Language: Syriac
Date: 782/3
Author: Patriarch Timothy I
Timothy was born in the early eighth century and became a patriarch of the East-Syrian Church. He died in Baghdad in 823. As a patriarch, he not only held charge over Christian communities, but also interacted with Muslim rulers as well. Among his extant literary works is a collection of fifty-nine letters, the last of which is an account of a disputation he had with the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775–85) in Baghdad. According to the written account, preserved in Syriac and representing the Patriarch's memory of the event, the debate occurred over the course of two days and covered an array of theological themes such as Christology and the Trinity as well as matters of Christian practice like circumcision, the direction of prayer and cross veneration. Timothy and al-Mahdī also discuss the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's significance for Christians as a prophet and an allegedly anonymous biblical figure.

The account of Timothy's disputation was popular among various Christian communities, judging by the manuscript witness and translations from a wide range of periods. Additionally, it functioned as a source for other Christian works devoted to Islam and in this way served as an important source of Christian knowledge about Islam. Further, the account demonstrates that inter-religious discussion was not at all unknown in the history of Christian–Muslim relations.

Mujādalat Abī Qurrah ma'a l-mutakallimīn al-muslimīn fī majlis al-khalīfa l-Ma'mūn
(*The Debate of Abū Qurrah*)
Language: Arabic
Date: after 829
Author: Unknown

This text is an account of a disputation allegedly between Theodore Abū Qurrah and Muslim scholars before the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–33). The author of the account is unknown and in fact it is not certain that the debate described in the account actually took place. It does seem clear, however, that a Melkite Christian who was familiar with Abū Qurrah and his writing composed a dialogue, either from a historical source or based on his recollection of a debate.

The text is preserved in numerous manuscripts and in more than one recension, but most of the manuscripts cover common points of debate between Muslims and Christians: various Christological concerns, questions about the life of Christ, matters of Trinitarian doctrine, the Qur'ān's discussion of Christians and polytheists, the nature of paradise and issues related to Christian scripture.[19] In one of the text's recensions, one of Abū Qurrah's interlocutors accuses Christians of committing idolatry when they venerate the cross. This accusation prompts a defence of cross veneration from Abū Qurrah in which echoes of John of Damascus can be heard.[20]

The account of Abū Qurrah's debate was widely read, judging from the manuscript witness, and later Christian communities used the text as a tool for not only catechism, given its treatment of theological themes central to Christian faith, but apologetics as well since it demonstrated how a master could skilfully explicate Christian

doctrine in an Islamic environment. Most significantly, the story of Abū Qurrah's debate, like other disputation accounts, dramatised the life of a Christian asserting his faith in a multi-confessional environment. As a result, readers could be encouraged to cling to their faith and avoid conversion to Islam.[21]

Risālah li-Abī Ra'iṭah l-Takrītī fī ithbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyyah wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-muqaddas
(*On the Proof of Christianity and the Trinity*)
Language: Arabic
Date: *c.*815–25
Author: Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī
Very little is known about Abū Rā'iṭah other than that he was from the Christian city of Takrīt near Baghdad and among the first generations of Arabic-speaking Christians. Some argue that he was a theologian or even a West-Syrian bishop.

Abū Rā'iṭah lived at a time when there was increasing pressure upon Christians to adapt to Islamic cultural milieus and even to become Muslims. So his theological treatises, among the first to be written in Arabic, functioned as a means for articulating Christian thought in a context influenced by the language and religion of Islam. *Risālah li-Abī Ra'iṭah l-Takrītī fī ithbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyyah wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-muqaddas* helped readers discern the true religion. To support this effort, Abū Rā'iṭah sets himself to a broad range of theological topics including the Trinity and Christology as well as matters of Christian practice. When it comes to Christian practices, Abū Rā'iṭah spends a good deal of time explaining Christian veneration of the cross in ways that Muslims might find easy to understand.

Risālah al-Kindī
(*The Apology of al-Kindī*)
Language: Arabic (Karshūnī)
Date: proposed ninth century
Author: Unknown
Nothing is known about al-Kindī beyond conjecture. Not even his exact Christian confession is certain. His full name, 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, means 'servant of the Messiah, son of Isaac' and his

family name (*nisbah*) indicates that he was from the Christian tribe of Kinda. In the apology for Christianity associated with his name, al-Kindī's interlocutor is a Muslim named 'Abdallāh ibn Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī, or 'servant of God, son of Ishmael' from the Banu Hashim, the prophet Muḥammad's tribe. Given the names' meanings, they may only be a rhetorical invention dramatising a debate between descendants of Sarah (al-Kindī) and the descendants of Hagar (al-Hāshimī).

The mystery surrounding the text's author extends to the dating of the text. Some place it in either the tenth or even fifteenth century, but internal evidence such as historical references to Caliph al-Ma'mūn would seem to situate the text in the ninth century.[22]

The apology is structured as an exchange of letters written in Karshūnī (the use of Syriac script to transcribe Arabic language) between al-Hāshimī and al-Kindī, each one inviting the other to convert based upon what is presumed to be a superior defence of his religion. Al-Kindī goes to great lengths to defend Christian doctrine in addition to deploying an aggressive attack against Muḥammad, the Qur'ān and Muslim beliefs and practices. One of his attacks upon Muslim piety is set in apposition to an explanation of the Christian practice of cross veneration (in his letter al-Hāshimī accuses Christians of worshiping the cross).

It seems most likely, despite the intention that the apology be understood as an exchange of letters, that the text was meant to be read by Christians in order to assure them of the strength of their faith vis-à-vis Islam. By reading the alleged letter from al-Hāshimī, readers might understand some of the basic Muslim concerns with Christian faith. Al-Kindī's letter in response then becomes a kind of apologetic primer for how Muslim reservations could be laid to rest. Similarly, al-Kindī's attacks upon Islam would diminish the attraction Christian readers might otherwise have to the religion.

It seems that the *Risālah* was a success for it is arguably the most well-known text of its kind written by an Arabic-speaking Christian. The text enjoys wide manuscript witness in both Arabic and Latin translations and it was even part of the monumental translation project commissioned by Peter the Venerable in the twelfth century. As such, it was one of the main sources of information about Islam for many Christians in the medieval period.

Tash'itā d-rabban Sargīs
(*The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*)
Language: Syriac
Date: early ninth century
Author: Unknown

The originator of a story written in Syriac and meant to explain the rise of Islam from a Christian perspective is not known. Its main character, a Christian monk variously called Sergius or Baḥīrā, is well known as he appears in numerous Christian anti-Muslim texts. Further, the *Legend* exploits a similar story as it is found in Muslim biographies of Muḥammad where Baḥīrā recognises Muḥammad as the final prophet.[23]

The *Legend* begins and ends with apocalyptic sections that attempt to situate the rise of Muḥammad and Islam in the sequence of divine events that not only explain the plight of Christians under Muslim rule but also their eventual triumph with the second coming of Christ. In between these sections is the story of Baḥīrā meeting Muḥammad. Leading up to this encounter, the monk is said to proclaim the veneration of one cross by Christian communities (instead of multiple crosses in churches) and the removal of crosses from churches and sacred sites. Baḥīrā is persecuted for this message and flees to Arabia where he encounters Muḥammad and recognises him as the one who would be the leader of the Arabs.

The text functioned as both explanation and encouragement for Christian readers. It helped clarify the emergence of Islam and its political ascendency. God ordained this event – and so the plight of Christian communities was not a breach of God's omnipotence – but Muslims had limited power. Christians had reason to cling to their faith, then, hoping for God's hand that would stay the spread of Muslim power. Similarly, the text explained Islam as a derivative form of Christianity for Arabs. As a result, Christianity remained doctrinally superior.

Kitāb al-burhān
(*The Proof*)
Language: Arabic
Date: after 838
Author: 'Ammār al-Baṣrī

'Ammār al-Baṣrī, as part of his name suggests, was associated with the city of Basra in Iraq. An East-Syrian Christian, he flourished in the

mid-ninth century. Beyond these meagre details, very little else is known about him.

As far as is known, ʿAmmar wrote two theological treatises. His *Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba* (*Questions and Answers*) is an apology for Christianity that addresses questions Muslims were likely to pose to Christians. This work is significant for the way ʿAmmār addresses Muslim questions and it was used by other authors centuries after his death. Building off of this work, even incorporating sections of it, ʿAmmār wrote his *Kitāb al-burhān* sometime after 838 as another apology for Christian faith. This work is divided into twelve sections and covers the full range of Christian doctrines, ordering them according to the divine economy of salvation. Hence, ʿAmmār begins with proofs for the existence of God and ways one might determine the true religion and moves on to treatments of Christian scripture, the Trinity and Christology (the natures of Christ, the incarnation and the crucifixion). Towards the end of the work, ʿAmmār addresses Christian practices such as baptism, the Eucharist and cross veneration.

Like many other apologetic texts written by Christians in Islamic milieus, the *Kitāb al-burhān* functioned as an apologetic sourcebook for Christians. This would be important, especially for Christian communities for whom religious disputation with Muslims would not be unthinkable.[24] And, given its organised structure, Christian readers could refer to the text with relative ease and find guidance for how best to respond to Muslim questions about or concerns with Christian faith.

Al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā
(*Refutation of the Christians*)
Language: Arabic
Date: *c.*850
Author: ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī

Al-Ṭabarī was born into an East-Syrian Christian family of some means and was even employed by caliphs. He converted to Islam quite late in life, perhaps at 70 years old. He was known for a number of scientific and medical writings in addition to two anti-Christian treatises. In his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* (*The Book of Religion and Empire*), he spends a great deal of time providing proofs for the prophethood of Muḥammad, many of them taken from Christian scripture.

Prior to this work, however, al-Ṭabarī wrote a work that functioned in part to defend his conversion from Christianity. This work was his *Al-radd ʻalā l-Naṣārā* and contains al-Ṭabarī's objections to Christianity. In the midst of his arguments, many of them attempts to demonstrate inconsistences inherent in Christian scripture and theology, al-Ṭabarī questions the Christian habit of wearing crosses and making the sign of the cross.[25] The text was a significant rebuttal of Christianity, coming as it did from a convert, and worked to set Islam over and above Christianity, a religion that al-Ṭabarī deemed insufficient.

Al-Jāmiʻ wujūh al-īmān
(*The Compilations of the Aspects of Faith*/*Summa theologiae arabica*)
Language: Arabic
Date: before 877
Author: Unknown

The author of this text is not known and some argue that it may actually be a compilation of material collated by an editor.[26] If the text is the responsibility of a single author, then it would seem from internal evidence that he was a Melkite Christian, perhaps a monk or a priest, writing from the mid-ninth century. Internal evidence could focus this date to 867,[27] but the text was at least written before 877 when the earliest dated copy of the text was written.

The content of the text ranges widely and covers in detail matters of Trinitarian doctrine and Christology. The author also addresses common theological questions faced by the Christian community in his vicinity. Because of this wide-ranging nature, Griffith has popularised the title *Summa theologiae arabica* for the text. The author also clearly writes with pastoral concerns for a Christian community tempted to soften some of the markers that would distinguish them from Muslims. With this in mind, the author writes quite strongly against those who alter Christian formulae in order to avoid offending Muslims and considers beliefs that would exclude those who hold them from being accepted by the Christian community. With this in mind, it seems that the Christian communities known to the author were facing temptations to assimilate to their Islamic milieu, not just culturally or linguistically (they were obviously already reading and speaking Arabic), but doctrinally as well. The author's text, then, becomes a reminder of what it means to be a Christian in an environment where opposing truth claims had

significant influence. For the author, the cross in particular becomes an important marker that distinguishes Christians and he gives careful attention to cross veneration.

Ḥadīth Wāṣil al-Dimashqī
(*The Account of Wāṣil al-Dimashqī*)
Language: Arabic
Date: possibly ninth century
Author: Unknown

The author of this account is not known, but the text tells the story of a disputation between Bashīr, a Byzantine nobleman, and a Muslim from Damascus named Wāṣil who was among a group of Muslim captives. According to the story, Bashīr poses theological questions to Wāṣil who demonstrates that the divinity of Christ is a logical impossibility. The debate resumes the next day, this time with the addition of a king and Christian priests, whom Wāṣil confounds and continues to expose the inconsistencies inherent in Christian doctrine.

As a last resort, the king has Wāṣil taken to the main church where the Muslim recites the call to prayer. Infuriated, the Christians accompanying him beat Wāṣil and implore the king to have him killed. But Wāṣil threatens that when the caliph hears of his death he will, in turn, kill priests and destroy churches along with their crosses and bells. His life secure, there follows a discussion of idolatry whereupon Wāṣil accuses Christians of worshiping what they have made with their hands, despite an absence of any such command to do so in the Gospel. This prompts the king to lament the state of Christianity – his priests have made the faith like idolatry according to the text – and he orders the destruction of icons. In all of this, Wāṣil is made to appear intellectually superior to his opponents and he exposes the inconsistencies of both Christian doctrine and practice.

Much of the theological discussion in the account is reminiscent of arguments employed in the ninth century. Further, Griffith argues that Wāṣil may actually be Wāṣil ibn ʻAtta' (d. 749), the founder of the Muʻtazilah school of Islamic theological thought and that the unnamed king is the Byzantine emperor Leo III. Bashīr is likely to be Bēsēr, a Christian who appears in accounts from the ninth century as a Byzantine nobleman who converts to Islam and then back to Christianity.[28] In any case, the text works to demonstrate the alleged superiority of Islamic

doctrine and suggests some colourful background for Christian iconophobia and iconoclasm.

Mujādalat al-rāhib al-qiddīs Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī ma'a l-amīr 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī
(*The Disputation of Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī*)
Language: Arabic
Date: late ninth century
Author: Unknown

Once again, it cannot be certain who the author of this account of a disputation between a Christian monk and a group of Muslims is. The story is situated in the early ninth century, perhaps around 820, but the author may have written the account later. This ambiguity extends into questions about the authenticity of the debate. Did the debate actually occur and were the individuals the account describes historical figures? It would seem that the debate actually occurred, but that the account as we have it today is, at the very least, interspersed with fictionalised details.[29]

According to the details given of the debate, the monk engages his interlocutors on a number of the usual theological concerns between Christians and Muslims – the Trinity, Christology, scripture and Christian practices – and the monk demonstrates his superiority in each case. At one point, the monk even overcomes trials by poison and fire. In doing so, he proves the superior power of the cross. As we have already seen with other disputation accounts, this one served as a kind of apologetic sourcebook for Christians living in Islamic milieus and it could function as an encouraging resource for these same kinds of Christians as they read a demonstration of the strength of their faith in the midst of opposition. Judging from the lengthy manuscript witness of the text, the account of Ibrāhīm's debate enjoyed significant popularity among Arabic-speaking Christians.

Kitāb al-burhān
(*The Proof*)
Language: Arabic
Date: late ninth or early tenth century
Author: Peter of Bayt Ra's

Modern scholars misidentified the author of this *Kitāb al-burhān* (not to be confused with the similarly titled work by 'Ammār al-Baṣrī discussed

above) as the Melkite patriarch Eutychius of Alexandria. However, a note in the earliest known manuscript of the work identifies the author as Peter of Bayt Ra's. From the text he wrote, it is clear that he was a Melkite Christian who was well versed in Christian theology, scripture and Islam.

The text is structured as a theological treatise with *testimonia*, lists of Old Testament references that support or foreshadow Christ and Christian doctrine. The text functions as a means for supporting neo-Chalcedonian doctrine vis-à-vis other Christian traditions, but it is also apparent that Peter was aware of topics inherent to Christian–Muslim debate. His use and awareness of the Qur'ān bears testimony to this and of particular interest in this regard is his discussion of seven items left to the Church by Christ: baptism, the Eucharist, the cross, the resurrection, facing east in prayer (which he calls a *qiblah*), sacred places related to Christ and the oil of chrism. Many of these topics evince an Islamic background to Peter's writing and it is apparent that Peter is intent to subtly assert the finality of Christianity over and against the claims of Muḥammad.[30] In this light, much of what Peter writes can be read as an effort to establish the ancient roots of Christianity in a land that was at the time firmly under Muslim rule.

Kitāb Usṭāth
(*The Book of Eustathius*)
Language: Arabic
Date: possibly ninth century; not later than tenth century
Author: Usṭāth al-Rāhib

Very little is known about Eustathius the monk (Usṭāth al-Rāhib), though he may have lived in ninth-century Iraq. An apologetic text he wrote, the *Kitāb Usṭāth*, is known and mentioned by other medieval Christian authors.[31]

Eustathius' text is purported to be a response to opponents who found 'fault with the Christians and their religion'.[32] Hence, the text is an explication of Christian doctrine and a defence of Christian practice. With this in mind, Eustathius is keen to address Muslim concerns about the contradictions that they felt were inherent to Christian doctrine and practice. These include the Muslim charge that Christian Christology did not conform to reason. Eustathius also attempts to defend the Christian practice of venerating icons and, as in other sections of his

work that refer to the Qur'ān, he turns to examples from within Islam and Muslim practice and exploits them for the ways they can support his arguments.

Kitāb al-bayān al-mukhtaṣar fī l-īmān
(*A Brief Exposition of the Faith*)
Language: Arabic
Date: perhaps 940s or 950s
Author: Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa'
Sāwīrus was likely born in Cairo and became a bishop of al-Ashmūnayn. Before his death in the late tenth century he became one of the first Coptic Orthodox theologians to write in Arabic. He wrote numerous texts and was a skilled debater, engaging both Muslim and Jewish opponents.

Among his written works, his *Kitāb al-bayān al-mukhtaṣar fī l-īmān* is a shorter work that functioned as both catechesis and apology. As such it covers a variety of topics related to Christianity and questions that Muslims posed to Christians. Among the concerns raised by Muslims, Sāwīrus addresses various Christian practices such as their direction of prayer, baptism, the Eucharist and veneration of icons and the cross. The text refers specifically to the monk Usṭāth (or Eustathius, for whom, see above) and depends in some places quite heavily on his *Kitāb Usṭāth*.

Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa
(*The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood*)
Language: Arabic
Date: 995
Author: 'Abd al-Jabbār
'Abd al-Jabbār was a high-ranking *qāḍī* who, at various times was both the object of praise and scorn from the ruling elite. Hence, while he rose through the ranks as *qāḍī* and theologian, he also made enemies. For example, he refused to officiate the funeral of one such enemy and, as a result, was imprisoned. Even so, he maintained a large following of students and wrote and taught until his death in 1025.

'Abd al-Jabbār is well known for his prolific writings on matters of Islamic theology, in particular the Mu'tazilah concerns of divine oneness and justice and he devoted his major work, *Al-mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl* (*Summa on the Matters of Divine Unity and Divine Justice*), to

these topics. He also devoted a lengthy work to the prophethood of Muḥammad, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (*The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood*). As the title suggests, 'Abd al-Jabbār writes to substantiate the status of Muḥammad as a prophet. Part of his method for doing this departs from those of other Muslim writers who composed great lists of miracles that might prove Muḥammad's status. 'Abd al-Jabbār instead focuses on attacking his opponents and, in a section of this work titled 'Critique of Christian Origins', he critiques the history of Christianity, Christian doctrine, Christian use of scripture and various Christian practices. By tearing down these elements of Christianity, he hoped to prop up Muḥammad as God's final messenger. In turn, Muslims who read 'Abd al-Jabbār's work could be assured of the authenticity and superiority of the Prophet and his claims to a final revelation from God despite the criticism of various Christians.

Radd 'alā risālat malik al-Rūm
(*Refutation of the Byzantine Emperor's Letter*)
Language: Arabic
Date: before 1064
Author: Ibn Ḥazm

A descendant of a Christian convert to Islam, Ibn Ḥazm was one of the greatest Muslim figures to emerge from al-Andalus, the shifting territories ruled by Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. He received an excellent education and demonstrated mastery in poetry, history, philosophy, law and theology. A controversial figure, he endured both exile and imprisonment all the while championing the Shāfi'ī legal school and later becoming a leading figure of Ẓāhirī jurisprudence. In his writings, Ibn Ḥazm frequently attacked those who disagreed with him and he demonstrates a deep familiarity with his opponents' various beliefs. This is especially the case with Christianity and Christian scripture.

In 966, an anonymous Christian wrote a polemical *qaṣīdah*, or poem, in Arabic on behalf of the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus Phocas (d. 969). In it, the author extolled the superiority of Christianity over Islam. Nearly a century later, Ibn Ḥazm responded with a poem of his own (the exact title is unknown), mentioning Muslim victories and their intent to extend the power of Islam. He also attacks Christian doctrine and their allegedly corrupt scripture.

Kitāb al-hidāyā
(*Guidance*)
Language: Arabic
Date: eleventh century
Author: Ibn Athradī
Ibn Athradī was an East-Syrian Christian from eleventh-century Baghdad. He wrote a number of medical texts as a well as a theological handbook, the *Kitāb al-hidāyā*. This theological text, only part of which is preserved, discusses a variety of theological topics and religious practices. These include discussions pertaining to the Trinity, paradise, Christology and practices like prayer, the Eucharist and veneration of the cross. Given the variety of topics, it seems that Ibn Athradī is keen to provide his community with an explication of Christianity that wrestles with the realities of the Muslim environment in which it existed, helping to guide them through the challenges Islam posed to their faith.

Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn
(*The Fundamentals of Religion*)
Language: Arabic
Date: before 1132
Author: Elias II (Ibn al-Muqlī)
Elias was born in Mosul and became an East-Syrian patriarch. Very little else is known about him. His *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, the only known text he wrote, is written with Chalcedonians, West-Syrians, Jews and Muslims in mind.[33] The text is apologetic in nature and discusses the Trinity, matters related to the incarnation, *testimonia* from the Old Testament about Christ and the veneration of crosses and images. In some passages, Elias works to refute Christologies from other Christian traditions such as the West-Syrians. In other sections, Elias has Muslims in mind, such as when he refutes the accusation that the Torah and the Gospel have been corrupted.

The *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, despite having specific opponents in mind, considers Elias' own religious community. In this way, he encourages the continual observance of prayer, fasting and other Christian practices. But passages directed more squarely upon opponents like Muslims demonstrates that theological and apologetic texts like these could not simply discuss intra-Christian issues. They had to consider their Islamic

environments as well. Hence, Elias' discussion of Christian theology and practice helped his community face the challenges of Islam.

Maqāmiʿ al-ṣulbān
(*Mallets for Crosses*)
Language: Arabic
Date: mid-twelfth century
Author: Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn Abī ʿUbayda al-Khazrajī

Al-Khazrajī was likely born in Córdoba, though he died in 1187 in Fes. He was trained by the best Islamic scholars of his day and trained many students himself as well. He spent some time in Toledo as a prisoner from 1145–6.

Al-Khazrajī's time as a prisoner forms the background of a polemical text he wrote attacking Christianity, the *Maqāmiʿ al-ṣulbān*. In this text, al-Khazrajī alleges to preserve a polemical letter written by a Christian priest in Toledo. The rest of al-Khazrajī's treatise is a response to this priest's claims and comprises an attack upon Christian doctrine and practice. Relevant to this study, al-Khazrajī argues that some elements of early Christianity, particularly the place of the cross as a symbol for Christianity and as an object of veneration, can be explained as Pauline and Constantinian corruptions of Christianity. Later Muslim authors took up this argument as well.[34] The text can be read as a response to the Toledan priest, and in this way as an example of medieval intellectual exchanges between Christians and Muslims, but it is more likely that the text (and the account of the alleged Christian priest's letter) functioned as a means for helping Muslim readers understand their faith as superior to Christianity.

Orūʿūtā lūqbal ʿammā d-Arabāyē
(*Dispute against the Nation of the Arabs*)
Language: Syriac
Date: before 1171
Author: Dionysius bar Ṣalībī

Bar Ṣalībī was a monk who became West-Syrian metropolitan of Amidā (Diyarbakir) in 1167. A prolific author, he wrote numerous texts devoted to theology and the liturgy as well as homilies, philosophical treatises and a biblical commentary. One of his texts, the

Or'utō luqbal 'amō d-Arābōyē is a polemical text and is connected to a larger series of attacks upon a number of non-Jacobite communities including East-Syrians, Jews and Muslims. Bar Ṣalībī's treatment of most of these communities is highly polemical, though his discussion of Muslims and Islam is somewhat more even-handed.

In the *Or'utō luqbal 'amō d-Arābōyē* Bar Ṣalībī covers early Islamic history and the main sects of Islam. He also discusses the prophethood of Muḥammad, treating many of the classical topics in Christian–Muslim relations pertaining to the Prophet: his presence or absence in the Bible, whether or not he was the Paraclete, his alleged inability to perform miracles and his apparent lack of morals. Bar Ṣalībī examines the apparent contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'ān and also compares Muslim and Christian depictions of the afterlife. He also discusses matters of Christian theology like the incarnation along with relevant Muslim objections. And he discusses why Christians venerate the cross.

The wide-ranging nature of the text make it one of the most comprehensive treatments of Islam to appear in Syriac and was intended to be used by its readers as a reference for debate with Muslims. This function was effective, or at least popular, and the text was even read by Christians outside of Bar Ṣalībī's West-Syrian community.[35]

***Al-naṣīḥa l-imāniyyah fī faḍīḥat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyyah* (*Faithful Counsel Concerning the Ignominy of the Christian Religion*)**

Language: Arabic

Date: before mid- or late twelfth century

Author: Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā ibn 'Īsā ibn Sa'īd al-Mutaṭabbib

Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā was a doctor from Basra who converted from Christianity to Islam. He was accomplished in poetry, linguistics and literature and died in the late twelfth century. One of the texts he wrote, the *Al-naṣīḥa l-imāniyyah fī faḍīḥat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyyah*, was a critique of his former religion and a justification for his conversion. The text makes extensive use of an earlier, unnamed source, but examines various Christian sects and differing doctrines, contradictions in Christian theology, Christ's alleged divinity, and biblical prophecies pertaining to Muḥammad. As a part of his critique of Christian claims, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā rejects Christian veneration of the cross, the use of icons and other Christian practices like the Eucharist.

In light of the text's manuscript witness, it was enormously popular among Muslim readers interested in reading an account from a former Christian of how their faith was superior to Christianity.[36]

Mujādalat Jirjī al-rāhib
(*Disputation of Jirjī the Monk*)
Language: Arabic
Date: early thirteenth century
Author: Unknown

It is entirely possible that this account of a religious debate between a monk and a group of Muslims in the court of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Ghāzī ibn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb (r. 1186–1218) is not authentic. In this way, an anonymous author, likely a Melkite monk or priest, may have structured a theological text as a debate. It also remains possible that the account is a fair representation of an authentic debate. Indeed, a colophon of the text states that the debate is described by a disciple of the monk Jirjī, the Christian protagonist in the account that purportedly took place in 1217.

The account of the debate covers a broad range of topics, all central to the general nature of Christian–Muslim disputation. Over the course of two days, the group discussed the alleged corruption of the Gospel, the prophetic status of Muḥammad, the process of discerning the true religion, Christian doctrines like the Trinity and incarnation, and Christian practices like veneration of the cross. The account also exhibits numerous attacks upon Islam, the Qur'ān and Muḥammad. On many occasions, a Muslim's question prompts Jirjī to share an elaborate parable. These parables were meant to ensure the monk's triumph, but like the account of the debate itself, they were also meant to dazzle readers. Indeed, the account of Jirjī's debate enjoyed immense popularity, suggesting that it functioned for many readers as spiritual encouragement even as it assured them of the superiority of their faith over and against Islam.

Ktābā d-simātā
(*Book of Treasures*)
Language: Syriac
Date: 1231
Author: Jacob bar Shakkō

Bar Shakkō was a monk and eventually abbot of the Mar Mattay monastery. He was also a titular bishop in the Easy-Syrian Church.

He died in 1241 in Mosul. One of his written works, the *Ktābā d-simātā*, is a theological treatise that he wrote when he was a monk. It covers standard theological topics like the Trinity and incarnation as well as other topics like physics and natural phenomena.

It is likely that the text was developed for novices in his monastery, but some of the subjects he addresses are framed by Muslim questions about the topics. He even addresses Muslims directly (referring to them as *ḥanpē*, *mhaggrāyē* or *ṭayyāyē*)[37] and describes their views of the Trinity, Christ, the day of judgement and paradise. He also discusses cross veneration and the historicity of the crucifixion contrariwise Muslim views. Subjects like these help Bar Shakkō to claim superior truth for Christianity and aid his readers in their discussions with Muslims.[38]

Maqālāt fī l-radd ʻalā l-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā
(*Treatises in Refutation of the Jews and Christians*)
Language: Arabic
Date: 1232
Author: Ibn al-Labbād

Ibn al-Labbād was born in Baghdad in 1163. He was an expert in theology and medicine, but the titles of his written works suggest his expertise went far beyond these subjects. He travelled widely, visiting cities like Cairo, Damascus and Jerusalem. He returned to Baghdad and died there in 1232.

Most of his written works are now lost, but references in other works refer to three treatises by Ibn al-Labbād that focus on Jews and Christians; it is apparent that he treats the religious practices of these communities. In particular, his discussion of Christian veneration of images ties the practice to pre-Christian beliefs.[39]

Al-radd ʻalā l-Yahūd wa l-Muslimīn alladhīna yattahimūna l-Naṣārā bi-ʻibādat al-aṣnām li-sujūdihim li-l-ṣalīb wa-ikrāmihim ṣuwar al-Masīh wa-l-Sayyida wa-l-qiddīsīn
(*Refutation of the Jews and Muslims who Accuse the Christians of Worshiping Idols since They Venerate the Cross and Honour the Images of Christ, our Lady and the Saints*)
Language: Arabic
Date: early thirteenth century
Author: Isho'yahb bar Malkon

Bar Malkon was an East-Syrian Christian who became a bishop and then metropolitan of Nisibis before his death in 1246. He wrote in Syriac, but used Arabic for many of his theological writings. Indeed, many of these texts exhibit Bar Malkon's familiarity with the Islamic world in which he lived and it is clear that he was keen to help bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps between Syriac and Arabic given his work on a bilingual grammar of Syriac as well as a dictionary of difficult Syriac vocabulary for which he offers Arabic explanations.[40]

Despite his familiarity with and comfort in the linguistic and cultural world of Islam, Bar Malkon devoted some of his work to defending what he argued were the superior truth claims of Christianity. Some of these works focus on proving the truths of the Gospel, but Bar Malkon dedicates one apologetic text to responding to Muslim and Jewish criticisms of Christian veneration of the cross and icons. Most of his arguments are clearly offered for the benefit of Christian readers, so it seems likely that Bar Malkon intends his text to be read by Christians so that they could, in turn, have something substantial to say to Jews or Muslims who questioned them about their devotion to the cross or icons. Many of the arguments in this text depend upon similar treatises, especially the *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* of Elias II (see above), but Bar Malkon develops some of his own contributions as well.[41]

Kitāb al-I'lām bi-mā fī dīn al-Naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awhām wa-iẓhār maḥāsin dīn al-Islām wa-ithbāt nubuwwat nabiyyinā Muḥammad
(*Information about the Corruptions and Delusions of the Religion of the Christians and the Presentation of the Merits of the Religion of Islam and the Affirmation of the Prophethood of Our Prophet Muḥammad*)
Language: Arabic
Date: before 1258
Author: Al-Imām al-Qurṭubī
Al-Qurṭubī was a Mālikī jurist born in Córdoba. He travelled widely and studied *fiqh* and ḥadīth literature and died in Alexandria in 1258. One of his written works is a polemical treatise against Christianity that, in turn, argues for the superiority of Islam and the prophethood of Muḥammad. In this text, al-Qurṭubī preserves two Christian treatises for the sake of refuting them. Like al-Khazrajī (see above) before him, he places the development of early Christian practices,

such as devotion to the cross, in the context of Pauline and Constantinian corruptions.[42]

Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl
(*The Shaming of Those Who have Altered the Torah and the Gospel*)
Language: Arabic
Date: before 1221
Author: Ṣālih ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ja'farī
Not much is known about al-Ja'farī, but he is described as a scholar and jurist who was appointed as judge and governor of Qūṣ in Egypt. He was the author of three polemical texts that attack Christianity and attempt to demonstrate the corruptions inherent in Christian scripture, doctrine and practices such as Christian devotion to the cross.[43] Al-Ja'farī's *Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl* is the longest of his three texts, the other two being abridged versions of the *Takhjīl*.[44]

Majmū' uṣūl al-dīn
(*Compendium of the Principles of Religion*)
Language: Arabic
Date: between 1260–75
Author: Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl
Al-Mu'taman was born in Cairo in the early thirteenth century. A Coptic priest, he wrote texts devoted to the liturgy and homilies as well as biblical exegesis and even Coptic lexicography. His best-known work, however, was his *Majmū' uṣūl al-dīn* (*Compendium of the Principles of Religion*). This is an extensive work comprising seventy chapters divided into five parts. Al-Mu'taman covers a wide variety of philosophical and theological topics, as the designation *uṣūl al-dīn* (foundations or principles of religion) implies, and mentions a number of Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), and Christian scholars like al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl (see below) and Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046). In addition to discussions devoted to common theological topics like Christology, the Trinity and Christian scripture, the fourth part of the *Majmū' uṣūl al-dīn* addresses veneration of the cross, icons and a number of other religious practices.

As a whole, the *Majmū' uṣūl al-dīn* is a theological compendium, but al-Mu'taman's engagement with Muslim and Christian scholars, some of whom wrote religious apologies, and his focus on topics that were

frequently the targets of Muslim apologists gives the text an apologetic edge. In this way, the text can easily be read as a sourcebook addressing concerns that were staples of Christian–Muslim conversation and debate.

Al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb al-Naṣā'iḥ
(*The Truths in Response to 'The Advice'*)
Language: Arabic
Date: 1238–42
Author: Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl

Al-Ṣafī, the half-brother of al-Mu'taman (see above) was born in twelfth-century Cairo and was educated in Christian doctrine and Islamic sciences. He seems to have functioned in an ecclesiastical role, likely as a deacon. He was a prolific writer of mainly theological and apologetic works, many interacting with notable Muslim authors, and is one of the most well-known Copto-Arabic apologists of his time.[45]

His *Al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb al-Naṣā'iḥ* is a response to a Muslim refutation of Christianity (which, as the title of Al-Ṣafī's text implies, was titled *Al-Naṣā'iḥ*). The author of this Muslim text is not named by Al-Ṣafī, though he mentions that the Muslim converted to Islam at 70 years old. In another response to an anti-Christian polemical text, Al-Ṣafī identifies this convert as Ibn Rabban, or 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, the East-Syrian Christian convert to Islam from the ninth century (see above). With this in mind, Al-Ṣafī's *Al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb al-Naṣā'iḥ* can be considered the first Christian response to al-Ṭabarī's *Radd 'alā l-Naṣārā*. As noted above, al-Ṭabarī mocks Christian devotion to the cross and Al-Ṣafī responds to this criticism in his text, devoting an entire chapter to the topic of 'magnifying the cross'. Other topics, following al-Ṭabarī, include the Trinity and Christological concerns.[46] In all, Al-Ṣafī is keen to provide a comprehensive defence of Christian faith and practice even in light of historic Muslim objections.

Al-ajwiba l-fākhira 'an al-as'ila l-fājira fī l-radd 'alā l-milla l'kāfira
(*Superb Answers to Shameful Questions in Refutation of the Unbelieving Religion*)
Language: Arabic
Date: before 1285
Author: Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī

Al-Qarāfī was born in 1228 in Egypt. He moved to Cairo at a young age and became one of the leading Mālikī scholars. He was

an expert in *kalām*, *tafsīr* and science and was active in debate with Coptic Christians until his death in 1285. He was a prolific author of a range of works, among them refutations of Christianity.

One of the lengthiest of these works is his *Al-ajwiba l-fākhira 'an al-as'ila l-fājira fī l-radd 'alā l-milla l'kāfira*. Besides a detailed defence of Islam and the prophethood of Muḥammad, the text is also a rebuttal of a letter written by an unnamed Christian. Al-Qarāfī's response to this Christian letter is precise enough that it is clear he is responding to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* written by the Melkite Bishop Paul of Antioch in the early thirteenth century.[47]

Al-Qarāfī's text is lengthy and contains detailed and sustained arguments against Christianity. He demonstrates detailed knowledge of Christian scripture. His intent is to defend Islam against Christian (and Jewish) objections as well as to demonstrate the weakness of Christian and Jewish faith. With respect to Christianity, al-Qarāfī specifically attacks Christian veneration of the cross and icons as well as the practice of making the sign of the cross.[48] These arguments, as well as others, make use of texts from al-Ja'farī and al-Qurṭubī (see above). His attacks upon Christian faith and practice as well as his use of the Bible in order to substantiate the prophethood of Muḥammad would have left little doubt in his Muslim readers' minds of the superiority of Islam.

Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn
(*The Fundamentals of Religion*)
Language: Arabic
Date: early fourteenth century
Author: 'Abdisho' of Nisibis

'Abdisho' was an East-Syrian bishop and metropolitan of Nisibis and Armenia who died in 1318. He was a prolific author, writing in both Syriac and Arabic, and was proficient in the Islamic culture of his vicinity. Much of his work, even some of his sermons, is apologetic in nature and attempts to clarify Christian theological themes and assert the truth of Christianity.[49]

His *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* addresses Christian beliefs with which Christian readers would be concerned, but part of the text has Muslim readers in mind as well. Thus, he discusses many of the topics

commonly treated in Christian–Muslim dialogue. As such, Muslims who might read his text would be confronted with a presentation of the authenticity of the Gospel, the miracles of Christ and his sending of the Paraclete (a figure many Muslims connected with Muḥammad) and a response to the Muslim accusation that Christians have falsified their scripture (*taḥrīf*). Other theological topics included the Trinity and incarnation and an explanation of Christian veneration of the cross. In many cases, 'Abdisho''s discussion indicates that he intended Christian readers to benefit from a deeper understanding of their devotion and spiritual practices.[50] The *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* follows other similar texts rather closely, such as the work by Elias II with the same title (see above), but 'Abdisho' uniquely casts part of his text in rhymed prose, conforming it to the literary tastes of his day.[51]

Jawāb risālat ahl jazīrat Qubruṣ
(*Reply to the Letter from the People of Cyprus*)
Language: Arabic
Date: 1321
Author: Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī

Al-Dimashqī was born near Damascus in 1256. He was a well-known imam and wrote on a variety of topics including history, theology, geography, and mathematics. In June 1321 he replied to a letter sent to him a few months earlier by an anonymous Christian from Cyprus, an edited version of the early thirteenth-century *Letter to a Muslim Friend* by the Melkite Bishop Paul of Antioch.[52] The edited version of this letter, the one sent from Cyprus, is a demonstration of the superiority of Christianity and argues that a proper reading of the Qur'ān could substantiate Christian claims.

Al-Dimashqī replied to the letter with a lengthy and detailed rebuttal. He quotes the Christian's letter and responds to it systematically, attacking Christian scripture and the history of its formation, much of which he deems a corruption perpetrated by the Apostle Paul and the Emperor Constantine. Al-Dimashqī's treatment of Christianity is often times intended to make a mockery of it and he spends much time defending the universality of Muḥammad's prophethood, a key point in response to the Christian letter's accusation of the Prophet's parochial limitations.

Tou autou epistolē hēn ex Asias, aichmalōtos ōn, pros tēn heautou ekklēsian apesteilen
(*Letter of {Gregory of Palamas} Which, as a Captive, He Sent from Asia to His Church*)
Language: Greek
Date: before 1354
Author: Gregory of Palamas

Gregory was born in Constantinople to a senator and imperial tutor. He left the city when he was about twenty years old to become a monk at Mount Athos. He was eventually ordained a priest. In the spring of 1354, while travelling from Thessaloniki to Constantinople, his ship was forced to take refuge in an area controlled by Ottomans. He was subsequently taken captive with the demand of a ransom and was released a year later.

While in captivity, Gregory wrote a letter about his captivity that was eventually sent to his church in Thessaloniki. In the letter, Gregory gives a detailed account of his experience and gives descriptions of Islam along with an account of a religious discussion he had with a Muslim concerning Christ and the prophethood of Muḥammad. Detailed descriptions of other, similar disputations are included as well, one of which involves a group of Turks and Muslim scholars who were converts to Islam and approached Gregory with questions for him to answer. In another religious exchange, Gregory approaches a local religious scholar after observing him officiate a Muslim funeral. The subject of the meaning of the cross and the function of veneration in Christian worship are part of the concerns addressed in Gregory's discussions.

One must question whether the descriptions of these religious discussions accurately represent what occurred. The topics they address cover many of the standard concerns between Christians and Muslims, making the nature of the disputations seem at least partially contrived. It seems more than likely that the letter functioned as a means for providing Christian readers with information that would reinforce their faith or equip them to adequately respond to Muslim arguments. In this way, the letter served both catechetical and apologetic functions. Further, it would help to strengthen the resolve of Christians faced with the temptation to convert to Islam, a religion with significant and, in turn, confusing theological overlap with Christianity. This might be especially the case since Gregory's see of Thessaloniki faced growing Ottoman influence.[53]

APPENDIX II

AN ABBREVIATED GUIDE TO THE SOURCES

In the table below, each text's original-language title (where it is known or, in many cases, an editor's title for the text) and English title is listed (in **bold**) first. This is followed by the original language of composition, the date of its composition and the text's author. A Christian author's tradition is given when it is known or can be reasonably surmised.

For the reader's easy reference, the last column lists the location of each text in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* (*CMR*). This multi-volume work identifies every known text written by a Muslim about Christianity or by a Christian about Islam. Each entry in *CMR* gives a brief discussion of the text and its author and lists all known manuscripts, editions, translations and some of the most important studies in secondary sources.

	Text	Language	Date	Author	CMR
1	***The Letter of Leo III*** (in Ghewond)	Unknown	*c.*eighth century	Unknown	1:203–8
2	*Drāshā da-hwā l-ḥad men Ṭayyāyē ʿam iḥidyā ḥad b-ʿumrā d-Bēt Ḥālē* (***The Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable***)	Syriac	*c.*720s	Unknown (East-Syrian)	1:268–73
3	'De haeresibus' ('On Heresies', chapter 100)	Greek	*c.*mid-eighth century	John of Damascus (Melkite)	1:297–301
4	*Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (***On the Triune Nature of God***)	Arabic	755 or 788	Unknown (Melkite)	1:330–3
5	*Ktābā d-Eskūlyūn/Liber scholiorum* (***Book of scholia***)	Syriac	791/792	Theodore Bar Koni (East-Syrian)	1:344–6
6	***The Letter of ʿUmar II to Leo III***	Arabic	*c.*mid/late eighth century	Unknown	1:381–5
7	*Maymar qālahu Anbā Thāwudhūrūs usquf Ḥarrān al-muqaddas wa-huwa Abū Qurrah uthbitu fīhi anna l-sujūd li-ṣūrat al-Masīḥ ilāhinā lladhī {…}* (***A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons***)	Arabic	after 799	Theodore Abū Qurrah (Melkite)	1:463–6

Continued

	Text	Language	Date	Author	CMR
8	*Min qawl Thāwudūrus usquf Ḥarrān al-mukannā bi-Abī Qurrah ta'ana 'alā l-barrāniyyīn* (***Against the Outsiders***)	Arabic	late eighth or early ninth century	Theodore Abū Qurrah (Melkite)	1:470–1
9	*Tub dilēh kad dīlēh d-mār Ṭīmātē'ōs qāṭōlīqā drāshā da-'bad lwāt Mahdī 'amīrā da-mhaymānē b-sharbā d-haymānūtā da-kreṣṭyānūtā ba-znā d-shū'ālā wa-dpūnāy petgāmā* (***Disputation of Patriarch Timothy I with Caliph al-Mahdī***)	Syriac	782/3	Unknown (East-Syrian)	1:522–6
10	*Mujādalat Abī Qurrah ma'a l-mutakallimīn al-muslimīn fī majlis al-khalīfa l-Ma'mūn* (***The Debate of Abū Qurrah***)	Arabic	after 829	Unknown	1:556–64
11	*Risālah li-Abī Ra'iṭah l-Takrītī fī ithbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyyah wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-muqaddas* (***On the Proof of Christianity and the Trinity***)	Arabic	*c.*815–25	Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī (West-Syrian)	1:571–2

12	*Risālah al-Kindī* (***The Apology of al-Kindī***)	Arabic (Karshūnī)	proposed ninth century	Unknown (possibly East-Syrian)	1:585–94
13	*Tashʿitā d-rabban Sargīs* (***The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā***)	Syriac	early ninth century	Unknown (East-Syrian and West-Syrian recensions)	1:600–3
14	*Kitāb al-burhān* (***The Proof***)	Arabic	after 838	ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (East-Syrian)	1:607–10
15	*Al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* (***Refutation of the Christians***)	Arabic	*c.* 850	ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī	1:671–2
16	*Al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān* (***The Compilations of the Aspects of the Faith/Summa theologiae arabica***)	Arabic	before 877	Unknown (Melkite)	1:791–8
17	*Ḥadīth Wāṣil al-Dimashqī* (***The Account of Wāṣil al-Dimashqī***)	Arabic	possibly ninth century	Unknown	1:863–5
18	*Mujādalat al-rāhib al-qiddīs Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī maʿa l-amīr ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī* (***The Disputation of Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī***)	Arabic	late ninth century	Unknown (Melkite)	1:876–81
19	*Kitāb al-burḥān* (***The Proof***)	Arabic	late ninth or early tenth century	Peter of Bayt Raʾs (Melkite)	1:902–6

Continued

	Text	Language	Date	Author	CMR
20	*Kitāb Usṭāth* (***The Book of Eustathius***)	Arabic	possibly ninth century; not later than tenth century	Usṭāth al-Rāhib (West-Syrian)	1:908–10
21	*Kitāb al-bayān al-mukhtaṣar fī l-īmān* (***A Brief Exposition of the Faith***)	Arabic	perhaps 940s or 950s	Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (Coptic)	2:504–7
22	*Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwa* (***The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood***)	Arabic	995	‘Abd al-Jabbār	2:604–9
23	*Radd ‘alā risālat malik al-Rūm* (***Refutation of the Byzantine Emperor’s Letter***)	Arabic	before 1064	Ibn Ḥazm	3:143–5
24	*Kitāb al-hidāyā* (***Guidance***)	Arabic	eleventh century	Ibn Athradī (East-Syrian)	3:278–9
25	*Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* (***The Fundamentals of Religion***)	Arabic	before 1132	Elias II (Ibn al-Muqlī) (East-Syrian)	3:419–21
26	*Maqāmi‘ al-ṣulbān* (***Mallets for Crosses***)	Arabic	mid-twelfth century	Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Abī ‘Ubayda al-Khazrajī	3:527–8

27	*Orīʿūtā lūqbal ʿammā d-Arabāyē* (***Dispute against the Nation of the Arabs***)	Syriac	before 1171	Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (West-Syrian)	3:667–70
28	*Al-naṣīḥa l-imāniyyah fī faḍīḥat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyyah* (***Faithful Counsel Concerning the Ignominy of the Christian Religion***)	Arabic	mid- or late twelfth century	Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā	3:751–4
29	*Mujādalat Jirjī al-rāhib* (***Disputation of Jirjī the Monk***)	Arabic	early thirteenth century	Unknown (Melkite)	4:167–72
30	*Ktābā d-simātā* (***Book of Treasures***)	Syriac	1231	Jacob bar Shakkō (West-Syrian)	4:242–4
31	*Maqālāt fī l-radd ʿalā l-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā* (***Treatises in Refutation of the Jews and Christians***)	Arabic	before 1232	Ibn al-Labbād	4:249–50
32	*Al-radd ʿalā l-Yahūd wa l-Muslimīn alladhīna yattahimūna l-Naṣārā bi-ʿibādat al-aṣnām li-sujūdihim li-l-ṣalīb wa-ikrāmihim ṣuwar al-Masīḥ wa-l-Sayyida wa-l-qiddīsīn* (***Refutation of the Jews and Muslims who Accuse the Christians of Worshiping Idols since They Venerate the Cross and Honour the Images of Christ, our Lady and the Saints***)	Arabic	early thirteenth century	Ishoʿyahb bar Malkon (East-Syrian)	4:333–5

Continued

	Text	Language	Date	Author	CMR
33	*Kitāb al-I'lām bi-mā fī dīn al-Naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awhām wa-iẓhār maḥāsin dīn al-Islām wa-ithbāt nubuwwat nabiyyinā Muḥammad* (***Information about the Corruptions and Delusions of the Religion of the Christians and the Presentation of the Merits of the Religion of Islam and the Affirmation of the Prophethood of Our Prophet Muḥammad***)	Arabic	before 1258	Al-Imām al-Qurṭubī	4:392–4
34	*Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl* (***The Shaming of Those Who have Altered the Torah and the Gospel***)	Arabic	before 1221	Ṣālih ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ja'farī	4:481–3
35	*Majmū' uṣūl al-dīn* (***Compendium of the Principles of Religion***)	Arabic	between 1260 and 1275	Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl (Coptic)	4:533–7
36	*Al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb al-Naṣā'iḥ* (***The Truths in Response to 'The Advice'***)	Arabic	1238–42	Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl (Coptic)	4:542–4
37	*Al-ajwiba l-fākhira 'an al-as'ila l-fājira fī l-radd 'alā l-milla l'kāfira*	Arabic	before 1285	Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī	4:585–7

	(***Superb Answers to Shameful Questions in Refutation of the Unbelieving Religion***)				
38	*Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* (***The Fundamentals of Religion***)	Arabic	early fourteenth century	'Abdisho' of Nisibis (East-Syrian)	4:759–61
39	*Jawāb risālat ahl jazīrat Qubruṣ* (***Reply to the Letter from the People of Cyprus***)	Arabic	1321	Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī	4:799–801
40	*Tou autou epistolē hēn ex Asias, aichmalōtos ōn, pros tēn heautou ekklēsian apesteilen* (***Letter of {Gregory of Palamas} Which, as a Captive, He Sent from Asia to His Church***)	Greek	1354	Gregory Palamas (Greek Orthodox)	5:103–8

NOTES

Introduction Tracing the Life of a Theological and Political Idea

1. All dates in this book are given according to the Common Era.
2. Mena of Nikiou, *The Life of Isaac of Alexandria*, trans. D. N. Bell (Kalamazoo, MI, 1988), p. 71.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 72.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. For another account from seventh-century Egypt that concerns not just the sign of the cross, but also a relic of the True Cross, see *A Disputation over a Fragment of the Cross: A Medieval Arabic Text from the History of Christian-Jewish-Muslim Relations in Egypt*, ed. and trans. S.J. Davis, B. Orfali and S. Noble (Beyrouth, 2012). See also Harald Suermann, 'Copts and the Islam of the Seventh Century', in E. Grypeou, M.N. Swanson and D. Thomas (eds), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden, 2006).
10. For select Muslim interpretation of this passage, see Joseph Cumming, 'Did Jesus Die on the Cross? Reflections in Muslim Commentaries', in J.D. Woodberry, O. Zümrüt and M. Köylü (eds), *Muslim and Christian Reflections on Peace* (Lanham, MD, 2005), pp. 32–50; Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford, 2009); and Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany, 1991).
11. Abū l-Walīd, al-Bājī, 'Jawāb al-qāḍī Abū l-Walīd al-Bājī ilā risalah rāhib Faransā ilā al-Muslimīn', in D.M. Dunlop, 'A Christian Mission to Muslim Spain in the 11th Century', *Al-Andalus* 17 (1952), p. 272/295 (translation/edition).

12. Ibid., pp. 275/299.
13. Ibid., pp. 276/299.
14. Ibid., pp. 275/298–9.
15. Ibid., pp. 276/299.
16. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3.34.425 (*aḥādīth* are listed by volume, book and number). For more on this tradition and its relation to cross veneration, see the discussion in Chapter 3.
17. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden, 1972), p. 85.
18. Gerald R. Hawting, *'Širk* and "Idolatry" in Monotheist Polemic', in U. Rubin and D. J. Wasserstein (eds), *Dhimmis and Others: Jews and Christians and the World of Classical Islam*, Israel Oriental Studies XVII (Tel Aviv, 1997), pp. 120–1.
19. Jean-Marie Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and Umar: 'Umar's Letter Re-Discovered?', *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), p. 149. There is an alleged response from Leo included in Ghewond's eighth-century *History*. For more on this purported exchange, see the discussions in Chapter 3 and Appendix I.
20. Sidney H. Griffith, 'Bashīr/Bēsēr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III: The Islamic Recension of His Story in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 (2)', *Le Muséon* 103 (1990), pp. 318–19.
21. Ibid., pp. 326–7.
22. See Mark N. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.*, PhD diss., The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (1992, revised 1995), pp. 56, 86–7. An edition and translation of al-Ṭabarī's work appears in Rifaat Ebied and David Thomas, eds, *The Polemical Works of 'Ali al-Ṭabarī* (Leiden, 2016). In the thirteenth century, the Copt al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl responds directly to al-Ṭabarī in a text called *al-Ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb al-Naṣā'iḥ* (*The Truths in Response to 'The Advice'*). For more on this response, see the discussion in Chapter 3.
23. Nizar F. Hermes, 'The Byzantines in Medieval Arabic Poetry: Abu Firas' *Al-Rumiyyat* and the Poetic Responses of al-Qaffal and Ibn Hazm to Nicephorus Phocas', *Al-Qasida al-Arminiyya al-Mal'una* (The Armenian Cursed Ode)', *BYZANTINA ΣYMMEIKTA* 19 (2009), p. 335. Though not an apologetic response, similar poetic sentiments are discussed by Habib Zayat in his *La croix dans l'Islam: etude littéraire, rituelle et historique d'après les sources islamiques* (Harissa, 1935). See also Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, pp. 85–6.
24. See Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'.
25. E.g., 'Crosses, Icons and the Image of Christ in Edessa: The Place of Iconophobia in the Christian–Muslim Controversies of Early Islamic Times', in P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (eds), *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown* (Burlington, 2009); 'Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God: Iconophilia and Iconophobia in the World of Islam in Umayyad and Early Abbasid Times', in B. Groneberg and H. Spieckermann (eds), *Der Welt*

der Götterbilder (Berlin, 2007); 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Times', in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe–VIIIe siècles. Actes du Colloque International Lyon-Maisson de l'Orient Mediterranéen*, Paris-Institut du Monde Arabe, 11–15 September 1990 (Damascus, 1992); and his translation of Theodore Abū Qurrah's defence of Christian devotion to icons and crosses: *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, trans. S. Griffith, Eastern Christian Texts in Translation, Vol. 1 (Louvain, 1997).

26. E.g., Gerrit J. Reinink, 'The Veneration of Icons, the Cross, and the Bones of the Martyrs in an Early East-Syrian Apology against Islam', in D. Bumazhnov, E. Grypeou, T.B. Sailors and A. Toepel (eds), *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient. Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65. Geburtstag* (Leuven, 2011) and Herman Teule, 'The Veneration of Images in the East Syriac Tradition', in B. Broneberg and H. Spieckermann (eds), *Der Welt der Götterbilder* (Berlin, 2007).
27. Many of these texts contain arguments that are polemical in nature. Of course 'polemic' as a genre of literature does not appear regularly until after the medieval period. So, while I will not refer to texts as falling within a polemical genre, I will describe them as polemical in nature when they do express this kind of intention. See Ryan Szpiech, 'Introduction', in R. Szpiech (ed.), *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean* (New York, 2015), pp. 8–9.
28. In very few cases, such as a source of *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's theological treatise, *Kitāb al-yanābī* (*Wellsprings*), texts that are not strictly apologetic treatises are included, but these are kept to relevant comments in footnotes. Such is also the case with relevant texts that are written from outside Islamic milieus (e.g., Nicetas Choniates' thirteenth-century *Panoplia dogmatikē* [*The Armour of Doctrine*]). Other texts that mention cross veneration but lay outside the apologetic genre are not included. So, for example, legal texts are excluded like Imām al-Shāfi'ī's prohibition of displaying crosses given their ostensible declaration of false doctrine (see his *Kitāb al-umm*, vol. 4 [Beirut, 1973], p. 198), *fatāwā* from Ibn Taymiyyah in which he condemns to death those who venerate the cross (see, for example, Jon Hoover, 'Mas'ala fi-man yusammī l-khamīs 'īd', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett [eds], *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Vol. 4 (1200–1350)* [Leiden, 2012], pp. 874–5), or his anti-innovation legal treatise that includes a number of references to the cross and idolatry (see Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymīya's Struggle against Popular Religion with an Annotated Translation of his* Kitāb iqtiḍa' aṣ-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm [The Hague, 1976]). Similar *dhimmah* regulations in the so-called 'Pact of 'Umar' (see A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar* [London, 1930]) or Islamic traditions that mention the cross and idolatry (e.g., Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 9.93.532 or 7.72.836) are also excluded.

29. On the distinctions between these two sins, see '*Širk* and "Idolatry" in Monotheist Polemic', in U. Rubin and D.J. Wasserstein (eds), *Dhimmis and Others: Jews and Christians and the World of Classical Islam*. Israel Oriental Studies XVII (Tel Aviv, 1997).
30. For more discussion on Muslim opposition to Byzantium and the cross that symbolised its military power, see Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, pp. 72–6. As Swanson notes, attaching military victories to the symbol of the cross receded along with Christian victories against Muslim armies. In their place, the cross became victorious over Satan and was seen, apocalyptically, to be a sign of victory. But attachments would return with military victories (see ibid., p. 83). For more on the cross as power, see the discussion in Chapter 3.
31. Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York, 1995), p. 2. The same can also be said of Muslim texts where authors accuse Christians of worshiping crosses. For many Muslim readers of such texts, reading a Muslim author address the evidently idolatrous tendencies of Christian worship could solidify in their minds the superiority of their faith.
32. See Joshua Blau, 'A Melkite Arabic Literary *Lingua Franca* from the Second Half of the First Millennium', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* lvii/1 (1994), pp. 14–16. See also Sidney Griffith, '"Melkites", "Jacobites" and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria', in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years* (Leiden, 2001) and idem., 'The Church of Jerusalem and the "Melkites": The Making of an "Arab Orthodox" Christian Identity in the World of Islam, 750–1150 CE', in O. Limor and G.G. Stroumsa (eds), *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms* (Turnhout, 2006). The medieval Melkites are to be distinguished from present-day Melkite communities who, after 1729, came from the Orthodox Church into communion with the Roman Catholic Church and are presently known as Melkite Greek Catholics.
33. See Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, 2008), pp. 129–40 (where these communities as well as a few others are discussed).
34. Marlia Mundell, 'Monophysite Church Decoration', in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds), *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Birmingham, England, 1977), pp. 59–74 and Sebastian Brock, 'Iconoclasm and the Monophysites', in idem, pp. 53–7.
35. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā', p. 270.
36. Teule, 'The Veneration of Images in the East Syriac Tradition'.
37. See also the discussion in Juan Signes Codoñer, 'Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* lxvii (2013), pp. 135–87. Signes Codoñer focuses on Melkite communities, but considers other Christian traditions as well.
38. See Barasch, pp. 158–9.

39. Ibid., p. 167.
40. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. A. Louth (Crestwood, NY, 2003), p. 95.
41. Barasch, p. 269.
42. Theodore the Stoudite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. C.P. Roth (Crestwood, NY, 1981), p. 110. See also Barasch, p. 269.
43. Theodore the Stoudite, p. 110.
44. Ibid., p. 113.
45. Ibid., p. 35. Barasch, p. 270.
46. Ibid., pp. 272–3.
47. Ibid., p. 276.

Chapter 1 Stumbling over Images and Crosses

1. Sidney H. Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Practice of Venerating Images', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1984), pp. 58–9.
2. Theodore Abū Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, trans. S. Griffith, Eastern Christian Texts in Translation, Vol. 1 (Louvain, 1997), pp. 28–9.
3. Quoted in Norman H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (Westport, CT, 1955), p. 130.
4. Jamal J. Elias, *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), p. 47. See also Leslie W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 83–5.
5. See *De sanctis imaginibus* in J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 86b (Paris, 1865), pp. 3219–20. See also Norman H. Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', *The Harvard Theological Review* xliv/2 (April 1951), pp. 95–6.
6. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum Ducem*, in Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 28 (Paris, 1857), pp. 621–4. See also Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', p. 96.
7. Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York, 1995), p. 30.
8. Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. J.G. Frazer and rev. G.P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 253 (Cambridge, MA, 1931), pp. 198–9.
9. O. Gruppe, *Griechische mythologie und religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1906), p. 821, n. 2.
10. Barasch, p. 42. Interestingly, for an example where crosses undergo a rite of consecration, an Armenian practice other Christians thought came too close to idolatry, and even a case where Armenians are condemned for baptising crosses, see commentary on the twelfth-century poem by St Nersēs the Graceful in James R. Russell, 'The Credal Poem *Hawatov Xostovanim* ("I Confess in Faith") of St Nersēs the Graceful', in J.J. van Ginkel, H.L. Murre-van den Berg and T.M. van Lint (eds), *Redefining Christian Identity:*

Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam (Leuven, 2005), p. 205, n. 31.

11. Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', p. 96.
12. Ibid.
13. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum Ducem*, 623–4 (*Ouk en tō honō ton diabolon o Christos katērgēse kai tous daimonas, oude en auto tēn sōtērian eirgasato, all' en tō staurō. 'Hothen honous men orōntes oi daimones ou tremousin, oude phobountai; stauron de pollakis opōntes tremousi kai phrittousi, kai katargountai kai diōkontai*).
14. Barasch, p. 49.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 59.
17. Ibid., p. 50.
18. In the eighth century, John of Damascus notes that some Christians argued that images of Christ or the Holy Mother might be acceptable, but images of the saints should be prohibited. John disagreed, arguing that to show honour to the former, but not to the latter, was to sully the glory offered to Christ by his saints. See John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. A. Louth (Crestwood, NY, 2003), p. 32.
19. Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', pp. 94–5.
20. A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1935), p. 162.
21. *Les Trophées de Damas*, ed. G. Bardy, in R. Graffin and F. Nau (eds), *Patrologia Orientalis*, 15th edn (Paris, 1927), p. 245. See also, for example, *La Didascalie de Jacob*, ed. F. Nau, in R. Graffin and F. Nau (eds), *Patrologia Orientalis* 8, 15th edn (Paris, 1912), p. 740. See also Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', p. 104.
22. Ibid., p. 101.
23. See, for example, Philo, *On the Giants*, trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library 227 (Cambridge, MA, 1929), pp. 474–5 and commentary in Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA, 1962), pp. 29–30, n. 22 and Elias, p. 50.
24. Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', pp. 103–4.
25. Quoted in ibid., p. 98.
26. Ibid., p. 98.
27. These comments only appear in *florilegia* in the third Oration of the *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons* by John of Damascus. See John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, p. 125. See also Alexander Alexakis, 'Stephen of Bostra: Fragmenta contra Iudaeos (CPG 7790)', in H. Hunger and W. Hörandner (eds), *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistick*, Vol. 43 (Wien, 1993).
28. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, pp. 125–6. Stephen of Bostra also makes a distinction here, based on his discussion of creations in the Old Testament that are used in Jewish worship, between two types of

veneration: worship offered only to God (*latreia*) and veneration expressing honour to something that honours God (*timē*). Cf. Louth's comments in ibid., p. 126, n. 201 and Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, 2009), p. 22.

29. Cf. Mark N. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.*, PhD diss., The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (1992, revised 1995), p. 88.
30. Ibid., pp. 100–1, 102, 104.
31. Quoted in Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', p. 100.
32. Ibid., pp. 98, 99, 104.
33. Quoted in ibid., p. 98.
34. Quoted in ibid., p. 99.
35. Ibid., p. 98.
36. Ibid., pp. 99, 103.
37. Quoted in ibid., p. 99.
38. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones* as quoted in Shaun O'Sullivan, 'Anti-Jewish Polemic and Early Islam', in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden, 2007), p. 57.
39. Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', pp. 99, 100, 102.
40. Ibid., pp. 99, 102.
41. Cf. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, pp. 88–9.
42. For an introduction to and translation of the orations, see John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. See Louth's comments on the texts' literary context in ibid., pp. 9–10. See also Sidney Griffith, 'Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God: Iconophilia and Iconophobia in the World of Islam in Umayyad and Early Abbasid Times', in B. Groneberg and H. Spieckermann (eds), *Der Welt der Götterbilder* (Berlin, 2007), p. 360. Cf. idem, '"Melkites", "Jacobites" and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria', in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 26–7.
43. Barasch, p. 189.
44. See ibid., pp. 185–253.
45. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, p. 25. See also ibid., p. 95.
46. Ibid., p. 96.
47. Ibid., p. 98.
48. Ibid., p. 99.
49. Ibid., p. 68.
50. Ibid., p. 46.
51. Ibid., p. 45.
52. Ibid., p. 27.
53. Ibid., p. 25.
54. Ibid., pp. 27–8; pp. 104–9.

55. Ibid., pp. 21–2.
56. Ibid., p. 22. See also pp. 47; 61–2; 70.
57. Ibid. Cf. ibid., pp. 86–7.
58. Ibid., pp. 24–5, 41; 62; 89.
59. Ibid., p. 101.
60. Ibid., p. 29.
61. Ibid., pp. 28–9.
62. For the cherubim, see ibid., pp. 33, 65; 70, 76; 116. For the Ark of the Covenant, see ibid., pp. 31, 32; 65, 76. For the tabernacle, see ibid., pp. 65, 70, 76.
63. Ibid., pp. 33–4.
64. Ibid., pp. 53–4; 99, 116–17.
65. Ibid., p. 150. John seems to suggest something similar on pp. 50–1 where he notes that Moses' staff withstood Pharaoh, divided the sea and produced water. He then cites Wisdom 14:7 where Solomon refers to the wood from which salvation comes. The latter is used as a reference to the cross; surely John sees Moses' staff in the same way here.
66. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, p. 119. The second quotation here comes from Basil's *Commentary on Isaias*. Basil is referred to frequently by John, especially in the *Orations' florilegium*, especially his notion of honour passing from an image to the image's prototype. See also John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, pp. 37 and 112. For other uses of the king/emperor metaphor, see ibid., pp. 35, 42, 47; 78–9, 80; 147, 150.
67. Ibid., p. 35.
68. Ibid., p. 42. See also pp. 47–8.
69. Ibid., p. 61.
70. Ibid., pp. 66–8, 70.
71. Ibid., pp. 86–7.
72. Ibid., p. 88.
73. Ibid., p. 63.
74. Ibid., p. 88. See also ibid., p. 54.
75. For examples of power made manifest in icons, see ibid., pp. 54, 55; 62. Interestingly, John is careful to point out that the significance or power of an object lay not in the matter of which it is made, but in its shape and function. He argues, for example, that 'once the pattern of the cross is destroyed, and (say) it is made of wood, then I will consign the wood to the fire, and so with images'. See ibid., p. 75.
76. Ibid., pp. 73, 74.
77. Ibid., p. 69.
78. Dietrich Stein, *Der Beginn des byzantinischen Bilderstreites und seine Entwicklung bis in die 40er Jahre des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1980), p. 211.
79. For general surveys see Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, 1987) and Elias.

80. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, pp. 45–74.
81. Sidney Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Times', in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe-VIIIe siècles*, Actes du Colloque International Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Mediterranéen, Paris-Institut du Monde Arabe, 11–15 September 1990 (Damascus, 1992), p. 123.
82. Ibid.
83. Rina Avner, 'The Dome of the Rock in Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem: Architecture and Architectural Iconography', *Muqarnas* 27 (2010), pp. 31–49 and Oleg Grabar, 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 33–62.
84. Ibid., pp. 53–4.
85. Ibid., p. 54.
86. Ibid., p. 55.
87. Ibid., pp. 55–6 and Griffith, 'Islam, Images and Christian Icons', pp. 123–4.
88. Ibid., p. 124.
89. Ibid., pp. 124–5. See also John Walker, *A Catalogue of the Arab-Sassanian Coins* (London, 1956); Gerald R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate, AD 661–750*, 2nd edn (New York, 2000), pp. 64–5; and an expansive review of the Walker's book by George C. Miles, 'The Iconography of Umayyad Coins', *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 207–13.
90. Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons', p. 125.
91. Ibid., pp. 125–6. See also Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 163–6.
92. Ibid., p. 126. Many of the early methods for regulating communities under Muslim control, known as *dhimmah* regulations (or stipulations governing the *ahl al-dhimmah*), were institutionalised in what came to be known as the Pact of 'Umar (though the regulations developed over time and varied according to both time and place). For more on *dhimmah* regulations see, for example, A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar* (London, 1930); Daniel Clement Dennet Jr, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 1950); C.E. Bosworth, 'The Concept of *Dhimma* in Early Islam', in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1: *The Central Lands* (New York, 1982); and Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, 1984). As Griffith and others have noted, early versions of the Pact of 'Umar do not include restrictions upon crosses but promises of security for, among other things, crosses. Even so, the explicit mention of crosses suggests that it was targeted. See Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons', pp. 126–7, n. 24. For more on al-Malik's efforts to claim public space for Islam, see Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 134–211; Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), p. 16;

Gerrit J. Reinink, 'Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam', in J.N. Bremmer, W.J. van Bekkum and A.L. Molendijk (eds), *Cultures of Conversions* (Leuven, 2006), p. 128.

93. Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons', p. 125.
94. For more on the edict of Yazid II, see A.A. Vasiliev, 'The Iconcoslastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956), pp. 23–47. Many scholars (Vasiliev included) wonder if the general Islamic attitude toward Christian images, though perhaps not specifically Yazid's edict, had any influence on the iconoclastic edicts of Leo III in 726. See G.R.D. King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* xlviii/2 (1985), pp. 267–8. In particular, Patricia Crone argued that Islam provided a context for Byzantine iconoclasm to emerge; Byzantine iconoclasm was effectively a response to Islam. See 'Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 59–95. And before Crone, Cyril Mango suggested that Byzantine iconoclasm should be considered as 'a Near Eastern movement'. See his 'Historical Introduction', in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), p. 6. However, Griffith (similar to King) reasons that 'charges of idolatry aside, the Byzantine campaigns and the controversies in the Islamic world were about very different things' and iconoclastic and iconophobic attitudes emerged in the Byzantine context for unique reasons and separately from Islamic contexts. See Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons', pp. 136–7. Cf. Hélène Ahrweiler, 'The Geography of Iconoclasm', in A. Breyer and J. Herrin (eds), *Iconoclasm*, where she argues that iconoclasm was a matter of demonstrating political attachments. Hence, Christian communities could demonstrate their political allegiances by adopting or distancing themselves from iconoclastic attitudes. Cf. also L.W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden, 1974).
95. '*Yézid. . . ordonna d'arracher et de mettre en pièces les peintures et les statues de tout ce qui vit et se meut, des temples et des édifices, des parois, des poutres, des pierres; celles qui furent trouvées dans les livres furent lacérées*.' J.B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. II (Paris, 1901), p. 489. See also Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons', p. 129.
96. See especially Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule*.
97. Robert Schick, 'Christian Life in Palestine during the Early Islamic Period', *Biblical Archaeologist* (December 1988), pp. 221–2 and idem, *The Christian Communities of Palestine*, pp. 164–6 where he notes the public display of crosses in graveyards, church exteriors and even a bathhouse in Palestine.
98. Roberto Tottoli's work is particularly significant here. See, for example, his 'Muslim Attitudes towards Prostration (*sujūd*). I. Arabs and Prostration at the Beginning of Islam and in the Qur'ān', *Studia Islamica* 88 (1998), pp. 5–34;

'Muslim Attitudes towards Prostration (*sujūd*). II: The Prominence and Meaning of Prostration in Muslim Literature', *Le Muséon* 111 (1998), pp. 405–26; 'The Thanksgiving Prostration (*sujūd al-shukr*) in Muslim Traditions', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61 (1998), pp. 309–13; and 'Muslim Traditions against Secular Prostration and Inter-Religious Polemic', *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999), pp. 99–111.

99. Roberto Tottoli, 'Traditions and Controversies Concerning the *Suǧūd al-Qur'ān* in *Ḥadīṯ* Literature', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 147 (1997), pp. 371–93.
100. Tottoli, 'Muslim Traditions against Secular Prostration and Inter-Religious Polemic'.
101. Griffith, 'Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God', pp. 359–60.
102. On the distinctions between Muslim accusations of *shirk* (attributing partners to God) and *kufr* (infidelity or unbelief) with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity and Christ's divine sonship on the one hand and accusations of idolatry on the other, see Gerald R. Hawting, '*Širk* and "Idolatry" in Monotheist Polemic' in U. Rubin and D.J. Wasserstein (eds), *Dhimmis and Others: Jews and Christians and the World of Classical Islam*. Israel Oriental Studies XVII (Tel Aviv, 1997), pp. 120–1.
103. On these developments, see Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, pp. 75–103 and, more recently, Elias, pp. 84–138.
104. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 4.54.447.
105. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, pp. 84–6.
106. Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons', p. 130.
107. Ibid., p. 136.
108. Most notable in this regard is the early eighth-century *Drāshā da-ḥwā l-ḥad men Ṭayyāyē 'am iḥidāyā ḥad ḥ-'umrā d-Bēt Ḥālē* (*The Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable*). For more on this important text, see the discussion in the Conclusion.
109. Griffith, '"Melkites", "Jacobites" and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria', pp. 26–7.
110. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, p. 20.
111. Ibid.
112. Griffith, '"Melkites", "Jacobites" and the Christological Controversies', p. 29. John argues in the words of Basil (in his *On the Holy Spirit*) that venerating the cross, facing east in prayer and baptising by immersing three times were traditions without explicit biblical support that were nonetheless traditions of the Church. Interestingly, cross veneration is not mentioned by Basil or in John's quotation of him in the first *Oration* (I.37). John adds the practice to his quotation of Basil in the second *Oration* (II.73). See Basil, 'De Spiritu Sancto', in P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8 (Peabody, 1999), 27.41.
113. Sidney Griffith, 'Crosses, Icons and the Image of Christ in Edessa: The Place of Iconophobia in the Christian–Muslim Controversies of Early Islamic Times',

in P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (eds), *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown* (Burlington, 2009), p. 73. On the relative isolation of Eastern Christian communities from 'Byzantine ecclesiastical affairs,' see idem, 'Eutychius of Alexandria on the Emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: A Tenth Century Moment in Christian Apologetics in Arabic: A Tenth Century Moment in Christian Apologetics in Arabic', *Byzantion* 52 (1982), pp. 173–4.

114. John Moorhead, 'Iconoclasm, the Cross and the Imperial Image', *Byzantion* lv/1 (1985), pp. 165–79.
115. See Griffith, 'Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God', pp. 362–5. Thus, while news of Byzantine iconoclastic policies may have shaped the attitudes of some Melkite Christians in John's vicinity, it must be maintained that Byzantine iconoclasm and Christian iconophobia in Islamic contexts were of entirely different orders. See ibid., pp. 377–88.
116. As quoted in Griffith, 'Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God', p. 367.
117. Theodore Abū Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of Holy Icons*, p. 56.
118. Ibid., p. 57. See also ibid., pp. 59–60.
119. Cf. Griffith, 'Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God', pp. 367–8.
120. Theodore Abū Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of Holy Icons*, p. 95. See also Griffith, 'Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God', p. 368.
121. On the use of crosses as symbols prior to Constantine in the early fourth century, when its function as a symbol gained *widespread* use, see Bruce Longenecker, *The Cross Before Constantine: The Early Life of a Christian Symbol* (Minneapolis, 2015).
122. Barasch, p. 8.

Chapter 2 Christians and Muslims Deflecting Accusations of Idolatry

1. See A.J. Wensinck and J. Jomier, 'Ka'ba', in E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat and C.E. Bosworth (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn (Leiden, 1997), 4: pp. 317–22.
2. Cf. Barbara Roggema, 'Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters – A Theme in the Christian Portrayal of Islam in the Near East', D. Thomas (ed.), *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 1–18. Interestingly, in the ninth-century text *Kitāb al-yanābī'* (*Wellsprings*), Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī does not compare Christian veneration of the cross to Muslim veneration of the Black Stone, but to veneration of the *shahādah*, the Muslim profession of faith. See Paul E. Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom* (Salt Lake City, 1994), pp. 93–5 (with commentary on pp. 177–9).
3. John of Damascus, 'De haeresibus', trans. D.J. Sahas in *John of Damascus on Islam: The 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 136–7.

4. In Greek, 'Peri haireseōn'. The text is actually the second part of a larger work called *Pēgē gnōseōs* (*Fount of Knowledge*).
5. John of Damascus, 'De haeresibus', pp. 132–3.
6. Cf. Qur'ān 4:71.
7. John of Damascus, 'De haeresibus', pp. 132–5.
8. Ibid., pp. 134–5.
9. Ibid.
10. Theodore Abū Qurrah also addressed this issue in a debate before Caliph al-Ma'mūn where his response depended in part on John of Damascus. See Alfred Guillaume, 'A Debate between Christian and Moslem Doctors', *Centenary Supplement to Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 56 (October 1924), p. 242. Accounts of the debate, as can be seen from its many manuscripts, were widely read. Not all of these manuscripts, however, contain a discussion of cross veneration. It is possible that some copyists added topics to the debate in order to make it more comprehensive. For more on this text, see David Bertaina, *An Arabic Account of Theodore Abu Qurra in Debate at the Court of Caliph al-Ma'mun: A Study in Early Christian and Muslim Literary Dialogues*, PhD diss., Catholic University of America (2007); Sidney H. Griffith, 'The Qur'ān in Arab Christian Texts; The Development of an Apologetical Argument: Abū Qurrah in the *Maǧlis* of al-Ma'mūn', *Parole de l'Orient* 24 (1999), pp. 203–33; and Mark N. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in Arabic Melkite Apologies', in S.K. Samir and J.S. Nielsen (eds), *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 120–1. Though not necessarily dependent upon John of Damascus, similar strategies can be seen in the *Kitāb Usṭāth* (*The Book of Eustathius*) written by a monk in the ninth or tenth century. See Mark N. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.*, PhD diss., The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (1992, revised 1995), pp. 31–4. See also the mid-tenth-century *Kitāb al-bayān al-mukhtaṣar fī l-īmān* (*A Brief Exposition of the Faith*) written by the Coptic bishop Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa'. The sixth chapter of this text addresses Christian veneration of the cross and icons. See Mark N. Swanson, 'Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa'', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds), *CMR, Vol. 2 (900–1050)* (Leiden, 2010), p. 505.
11. John of Damascus, 'De haeresibus', pp. 136–7.
12. See Gernot Rotter, 'Der *veneris dies* im vorislamischen Mekka, eine neue Deutung des Namens "Europe" und eine Erklärung für *kober* = Venus', *Der Islam* lxx/1 (1993), pp. 126–8. Cf. Roggema, 'Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters', p. 7. See also A.T. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 275–81. It is also interesting to note that Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople (r. 715–30), in a letter he wrote to Thomas of Claudiopolis in 724, accused Jews of being the 'true worshipers of idols' (as opposed to Christians whose veneration of images made them guilty of idolatry according to some) and accuses Muslims of the same, noting that 'they, up to our own

days, venerate in the desert an inanimate stone which is called "Chobar"'. See Joannes Dominicus Mansi, 'Concilia Nicaeni II', in J.D. Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, Vol. 13 (Florence, 1767), p. 109, D–E. See also A.A. Vasiliev, 'The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956), p. 26.

13. See Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, 1990), pp. 80–93.
14. Ibid., p. 83.
15. Ibid., pp. 87, 90. Some Christian authors pounced upon such information, using the opportunity to describe (and in some cases invent) for their Christian readers details of pre-Islamic history and, in their eyes, the pagan roots of Islamic piety. In the twelfth century, the section devoted to Islam in Petrus Alfonsi's widely read *Dialogus contra Iudaeos* (*Dialogue against the Jews*) made the claim that the black and white stones were the idols Mercury and Amon/Moab. See Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus contra Iudaeos*, trans. Irven M. Resnick in *Petrus Alfonsi: Dialogue against the Jews* (Washington, DC, 2006), pp. 157–8. See also Bernard Septimus, 'Petrus Alfonsi on the Cult of Mecca', *Speculum* lvi/3 (1981), pp. 517–33.
16. Firestone, p. 85.
17. Ibid., pp. 150–1.
18. Cf. Radko Popov, 'Speaking His Mind in a Multi-Cultural and Multi-Religious Society: John of Damascus and His Knowledge of Islam in Chapter 101 ("The Heresy of the Ishmaelites") of His Work Concerning Heresy', in G.C. Papademetriou (ed.), *Two Traditions, One Space: Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Dialogue* (Boston, 2011), pp. 128–9.
19. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 71–2, 86–7. Of course, acknowledging this polytheistic environment should not obscure the presence of Jewish and Christian communities in pre-Islamic Arabia.
20. According to John's account, Muḥammad was partially helped in his confusion by the influence of an 'Arian monk' (John of Damascus, 'De haeresibus', pp. 132–3). According to the *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (*Life of the Prophet of God*), the authoritative biography of Muḥammad, this was the monk Baḥīrā. See Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's* Sirat Rasul Allah (Karachi, 1967), pp. 79–81. He appears in many Christian sources, often as an East-Syrian monk (and often referred to as Sergius), and is used in order to demonstrate the heresy that influenced Muḥammad (in contexts where East-Syrian Christology [Nestorianism] was deemed heretical). On Baḥīrā/Sergius, see Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden, 2009) and Krisztina Szilágyi, 'Muḥammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Baḥīrā Legend', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), pp. 169–214.
21. John of Damascus, 'De haeresibus', pp. 136–7.

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, ed. and trans. G.S. Reynolds and S.K. Samir (Provo, UT, 2010), p. 107.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 109.
28. Ibid., p. 108.
29. Ibid., pp. 108–11.
30. Ibid., p. 111.
31. Ibid.
32. For other examples, see the ninth-century *Kitāb al-dīn wa-al-dawla* (*Book of Religion and Empire*) by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, a convert to Islam, in Alphonse Mingana, *The Book of Religion and Empire: A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam Written by Order at the Court and With the Assistance of Caliph Mutawakkil (A.D. 847–861)* (Manchester, 1922) or two Christian texts: Theodore Abū Qurrah's late eighth- or early ninth-century *Maymar fī taḥqīq al-Injīl wa-anna kullamā lā yuḥaqqiquhu l-Injīl fa-huwa bāṭil* (*Treatise on the Confirmation of the Gospel and that Everything that the Gospel Does Not Confirm is False*) trans. J.C. Lamoreaux in *Theodore Abū Qurrah* (Provo, UT, 2005), pp. 49–53 and the twelfth-century *Liber denudationis* (Book of Denuding) trans. by Thomas Burman in *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c.1050–1200* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 240–385.
33. See an edition and translation of the Christian letter, *Risāla min ahl jazīrat Qubruṣ* (*Letter from the People of Cyprus*), in Rifaat Ebied and David Thomas (eds), *Muslim–Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī's Response* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 53–147.
34. This is Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī, *Jawāb risālat ahl jazīrat Qubruṣ* (*Reply to the Letter of the People of Cyprus*), in R. Ebied and D. Thomas (eds), *Muslim–Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī's Response* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 150–497.
35. Al-Dimashqī, pp. 182–5. Al-Dimashqī claims that the emergence of Christianity under Constantine occurred 'about a hundred years or thereabouts after Christ' (ibid., pp. 183–4). In fact, Constantine came some 300 years after Christ. As for the development of scriptural interpretation, al-Dimashqī refers specifically to the prophecy of the 'one who was to come, whom Christ spoke about' (ibid., pp. 184–5). Al-Dimashqī has in mind passages like John 14:16 where Jesus promises the Paraclete (*paraklētos*). Muslims traditionally interpreted this to indicate the coming of Muḥammad (in their view the original reading was *periklutos*, 'illustrious' or 'renowned', and corresponded to *a-ḥ-d*, the root of Muḥammad's name meaning 'the most glorious'), but according to al-Dimashqī, scholars abandoned this interpretation so that Constantine's developments would continue without interference. For more on Muḥammad as the Paraclete and the arguments surrounding it, see Dominque

Urvoy, 'The Christological Consequences of Muslim–Christian Confrontation in Eighth-Century Spain', in M. Fierro and J. Samsó (eds), *The Formation of al-Andalus. Part 2: Language, Religion, Culture and the Sciences* (Brookfield, 1998), pp. 42–4 or Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Biblical Criticism* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 75–110.

36. Al-Dimashqī, pp. 390–1.
37. Ibid.
38. Many other Muslims would pick up the theme of accusing Paul of leading Christians astray in his creation of a religious deception, just as many Muslim writers would do with Constantine as well. Besides 'Abd al-Jabbar and al-Dimashqī, see, for example, Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ja'farī's thirteenth-century *Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl* (*The Shaming of Those Who Have Altered the Torah and the Gospel*) where he claims that Paul 'freed [Christians] from [the obligation] of religion with subtle deceptions' (see the edition edited by Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Qadaḥ, 2 vols (Riyadh, 1998), p. 589 with a translation of this passage by Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella in his *Muslim–Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean: The* Splendid Replies *of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 6841285)* (Leiden, 2015), p. 187, n. 33. See also the remarks by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī in the thirteenth century in his *al-Ajwiba l-fākhira 'an al-as'ila l-fājira fī l-radd 'alā l-milla l'kāfira* (*Superb Answers to Shameful Questions in Refutation of the Unbelieving Religion*) discussed by Cucarella in *Muslim–Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean*, pp. 185–8. Al-Qarāfī, who is responding to the early thirteenth-century *Letter to a Muslim friend* written by the Melkite Bishop Paul of Antioch (an edited form of which is responded to by al-Dimashqī and Ibn Taymiyyah), depends in part on similar remarks made by Al-Imām al-Qurṭubī (1182–1258) in his *Kitāb al-I'lām bi-mā fī dīn al-Naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awhām wa-iẓhār maḥāsin dīn al-Islām wa-ithbāt nubuwwat nabiyyinā Muḥammad* (*Information about the Corruptions and Delusions of the Religion of the Christians and the Presentation of the Merits of the Religion of Islam and the Affirmation of the Prophethood of Our Prophet Muḥammad*) who in turn drew arguments from Abū Ja'far Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Abī 'Ubayda al-Khazrajī (d. 1187) and his *Maqāmi' al-ṣulbān* (*Mallets for Crosses*). See Sarrió Cucarella, pp. 186 and 200.
39. Al-Dimashqī, pp. 396–401. Though al-Dimashqī recounts some of the details of Paul's life accurately, he also mishandles some Christian history. For instance, he incorrectly claims that Paul emerged about 150 years after Christ (traditionally, Paul was martyred under the Roman emperor Nero within only a few decades of Christ's crucifixion, in approximately 62). The story of the four scholars is also something al-Dimashqī introduces to the history. It appears to originate in Islamic polemical traditions. See commentary in Ebied and Thomas (eds), *Muslim–Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, p. 397, n. 23.
40. The allegations here are similar to some Christian portrayals of Muḥammad's prophethood insofar as they accused him of being on imposter who fashioned

himself as a prophet in order to gain followers. See, for instance, 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī's *Risālah* (*Apology*)', in N.A. Newman (ed.), *The Early Christian–Muslim Dialogue* (Hatfield, PA, 1993), 427.

41. Al-Dimashqī, pp. 400–1. Al-Dimashqī refers here to the *Mandylion*, the image of Christ's face that was initially venerated in Edessa. See the commentary in Ebied and Thomas (eds), *Muslim–Christian Polemic during the Crusades*, p. 401, n. 29. The East-Syrian Isho'yahb bar Malkon, in his early thirteenth-century *al-Radd 'alā l-Yahūd wa l-Muslimūn alladhīna yattahimūna l-Naṣārā bi-'ibādat al-aṣnām li-sujūdihim li-l-ṣalīb wa-ikrāmihim ṣuwar al-Masīḥ wa-l-Sayyida wa-l-qiddīsīn* (*Refutation of the Jews and the Muslims who Accuse the Christians of Worshiping Idols since They Venerate the Cross and Honor the Images of Christ, Our Lady and the Saints*), also discusses the introduction of the *Mandylion*, but not in the manipulative way suggested by al-Dimashqī. See Herman Teule, 'Iso'yahb bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages* (Beirut, 2007), p. 164. 'Abd al-Jabbār also alleges that Paul introduced Roman practices to Christianity, thereby distorting it. See 'Abd al-Jabbār, pp. 98–105.
42. Al-Dimashqī, pp. 400–1.
43. Interestingly Isho'yahb bar Malkon, in the text cited in n. 41 above, attributes veneration of the cross to Peter. He 'made the sign of the cross over Sīmūn the Sorcerer who fell from a height, was injured and died'. Isho'yahb refers here to a passage from the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* where the Apostle is said to have introduced veneration of the cross in churches in Rome and Antioch. See Teule, 'Iso'yahb bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', pp. 163–4.
44. Cf. comments by the thirteenth-century Muslim scholar Ibn al-Labbād who, in his *Maqālāt fī l-radd 'alā l-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣarā* (*Treatises in Refutation of the Jews and Christians*), claims that Christian practices like venerating images or creating icons were simply the vestiges of pre-Christian worship. See David Thomas, 'Ibn al-Labbād', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds), *CMR*, *Vol. 4 (1200–1350)* (Leiden, 2012), p. 249.
45. David Thomas, 'Cultural and Religious Supremacy in the Fourteenth Century: *The Letter from Cyprus* as Interreligious Apologetic', *Parole de l'Orient* 30 (2005), p. 307.
46. An introduction to the work can be found in Michel Hayek's "Ammār al-Baṣrī: La première somme de théologie Chrétienne en langue Arabe, our deux apologies du Christianisme', *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), pp. 69–104. Hayek's Arabic edition of the work appears in *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies* (Beyrouth, 1977).
47. Sidney H. Griffith, "Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: Christian *Kalām* in the First Abbasid Century', *Le Muséon* 96 (1983), pp. 154–5, pp. 160–1.
48. Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī's* Kitāb al-Burhān*: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century*, PhD diss.,

University of Birmingham, England (2013), pp. 259–60. For a similar text that also addresses cross veneration, see the eleventh-century *Kitāb al-hidāyā* (*Guidance*) by East-Syrian Ibn Athradī. See Herman G.B. Teule, 'Ibn Ahtradī,' in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds), *CMR, Vol. 3 (1050–1200)* (Leiden, 2011), p. 278.

49. Griffith, "Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*', p. 158. As Griffith notes here, the topics also follow the progression of 'customary topics in *Kalām* works composed by Muslim[s]'. See ibid.
50. Mikhail, p. 260.
51. Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies*, p. 79; translation in Mikhail, p. 400.
52. Cf. Qur'ān 4:50 and, especially in connection to the Islamic denial of Christ's crucifixion, 4:157.
53. Cf. similar arguments – one utilising a prize-fighter depleting all his strength in his effort to best his opponent and another with a doctor suffering the effects of medicine he has tested before offering it to his patient – in al-Baṣrī's more extensive apologetic work, the *Kitāb al-masā'il wa-l-ajwiba* (*Book of Questions and Answers*), from the early ninth century. An edition for this work is also in Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies* and a summary appears in Hayek, "Ammār al-Baṣrī: La première somme de théologie Chrétienne en langue Arabe, our deux apologies du Christianisme', pp. 104–27. See also Mark Beaumont, 'Debating the Cross in Early Christian Dialogues with Muslims', in D.E. Singh (ed.), *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts* (Eugene, OR, 2008), pp. 60–1.
54. Hayek, "Ammār al-Baṣrī: La première somme de théologie Chrétienne en langue Arabe, ou deux apologies du Christianisme', p. 103.
55. Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies*, p. 81; translation in Mikhail, p. 402.
56. Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies*, p. 87; translation in Mikhail, p. 407. Interestingly, al-Baṣri refers to the Ka'bah earlier in his argument for the incarnation – there the Ka'bah is offered as an example of one kind of revelation of God, like his voice in Moses' burning bush or the Ark of the Covenant. But these examples fall short of the culmination of God's revelation – his appearance on earth as a man. See Mikhail, pp. 389–90. His discussion of the Ka'bah in this argument lacks the invective that 'Ammār applies to it with respect to cross veneration.
57. In addition to his counterattack upon the revered place of John the Baptist in Islam, 'Ammār also deploys other counterattacks. For example, there is his discussion of Christian baptism ('As for that with which you mock us as you scorn baptism, [which we declare [. . .] abolishes sin], I return to them and thoroughly wonder about the apparent thing which they have neglected'. 'Ammār then considers the inherent contradictions of Islamic ritual ablutions. See Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies*, pp. 81–4; translation in Mikhail, p. 402) and his discourse on eating and drinking in paradise ('As for

what they reject of the Gospel concerning the abrogation of marriage, food, and drink in the everlasting life . . . we will return to them with the contrary of what they mentioned'. There follows comparisons between the Christian and Islamic visions of afterlife. See Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies*, pp. 88–90; translation in Mikhail, pp. 407–8).

58. Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies*, p. 87; translation in Mikhail, p. 407. Many other texts use a king as a metaphor for explaining the ways in which the cross is honoured, but not worshiped, by Christians. In particular, cf. Isho'yahb bar Malkon's text, cited in nn. 41 and 43 above, in which he explains that the carpet of the king is kissed, not for the carpet itself, but for what it represents of the king and out of reverence for him. See Herman Teule, 'Iso'yahb bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', p. 163.
59. Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controversies*, pp. 87–8; translation in Mikhail, p. 407.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Eugene, OR, 2011), pp. 69–70. Of course, Christian theologians could also be opponents, especially in light of opposing Christological confessions. See Sidney Griffith, '"Arab Christians"', in H.C. Evans and B. Ratliff (eds), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century* (New York, 2012), p. 60 and idem, '"Melkites," "Jacobites" and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third-Ninth Century Syria', in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years* (Leiden, 2001).
63. Theodore Abū Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, trans. S. Griffith, Eastern Christian Texts in Translation, vol. 1 (Louvain, 1997), pp. 75–7. Here Abū Qurrah responds to Jews who rebuke Christians for bowing before something other than God. Abū Qurrah points out that the very same actions are evident in Judaism and in the Hebrew Tanakh.
64. See note 10 above and Guillaume, 'A Debate between Christian and Moslem Doctors', p. 242.

Chapter 3 Responding to Accusations of Divine Shame, Explaining Cross Veneration as a Symbol of Honour and Power

1. John of Damascus, 'De haeresibus', trans. Sahas in *John of Damascus on Islam*, p. 137.
2. Jean-Marie Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence Between Leo and 'Umar: 'Umar's Letter Re-Discovered?', *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), pp. 109–57 and Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 490–501.

3. Arthur Jeffery, 'Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III', *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), p. 278.
4. Abū l-Walīd, al-Bājī, 'Jawāb al-qāḍī Abū l-Walīd al-Bājī ilā risalah rāhib Faransā ilā al-Muslimīn', in D.M. Dunlop, 'A Christian Mission to Muslim Spain in the 11th Century', *Al-Andalus* 17 (1952), pp. 275/98–9 (translation/edition).
5. Ibid., pp. 321–2. Cf. the thirteenth-century *Panoplia dogmatikē* (*The Armour of Doctrine*) by Nicetas Choniates who essentially assembles material from other known texts like this one in order to offer similar arguments. See Niccolò Zorzi, 'Nicetas Choniates', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds), *CMR, Vol. 4 (1200–1350)* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 140–4.
6. Theodore Abū Qurrah, 'Against the Outsiders', trans. J. Lamoreaux. Unpublished translation distributed electronically to the North American Society for Christian Arabic Studies, 1 June 2009.
7. Ibid. Cf. the similar pagan accusation included in Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum Ducem*, in Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 28 (Paris, 1857), pp. 621–4. Cf. Chapter 1, n. 6 and Norman H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (Westport, Connecticut, 1955), p. 96.
8. Abū Qurrah, 'Against the Outsiders'.
9. Ibid.
10. Alphonse Mingana, 'Timothy's Apology for Christianity', in *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1928), p. 39.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 40.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. In a common clarification in this kind of literature, Timothy is careful to note that Christ's death was experienced 'in the flesh', i.e., his human nature and not his divine nature. Statements like this allowed Christians to demonstrate care in predicating certain actions to certain natures of Christ, thereby not implicating one nature in an action that was only befitting the other. For example, only Christ's human nature experienced suffering while miracles were performed only by his divine nature. For more on this, see Charles Tieszen, 'Re-Planting Christianity in New Soil: Arabized Christian Religious Identity in Twelfth-Century Iberia', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* xxii/1 (January 2011), pp. 62–3.
16. Mingana, p. 40. A very similar kind of argument is applied to the doctrine of the incarnation nearly a century later by 'Ammār al-Baṣrī in his *Kitāb al-burhān*. Accordingly, God's self-revelation does not culminate in those instances where he merely spoke to humanity through a burning bush or the Ark of the Covenant or the Ka'bah – on this, both Muslims and Christians agree, claims 'Ammār. Rather, the culmination of God's self-revelation is in his appearance as a man. Like Timothy, then, there is a progression in

God's revelation. See Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī's* Kitāb al-Burhān*: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century.* PhD diss., University of Birmingham, England (2013), pp. 389–90.

17. Mingana, p. 40.
18. Sidney H. Griffith, 'Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam', in J.J. van Ginkel, H.L. Murre-van den Berg and T.M. van Lint (eds), *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam* (Leuven, 2005), pp. 101–2.
19. *"N'avez-vous pas lu que Dieu a décrété: 'Tu n'adoreras (aucune) figure ni forme?'"* Theodore bar Koni, *Livre des scolies (recension de Séert)*, ed. and trans. R. Hespel and R. Draguet, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 431–2 (Louvain, 1982), 270/201 (edition/translation). Intriguingly, Bar Koni begins the response to this charge of idolatry by having the master point, not back to Muslims like some of the authors examined in Chapter 2, but to the Jews. If Christians are guilty of idolatry when they venerate the cross, then the Jews must also be guilty of idolatry when they honoured the Ark of the Covenant. See ibid.
20. '*. . . mais que c'est le Christ qui fut crucifié pour nous que nous adorons dans ce type*.' Ibid.
21. '*La signification de la croix, c'est (d'être) la forme de la mort du Christ qui pour nous a été crucifié; ce type, c'est sans honte qui nous l'adorons, lui don't la force héroïque a été connue par la resurrection qu'il a faite; cette signification, nous la représentons et la faisons*.' Ibid.
22. '*. . . confesses-tu que Dieu était dans le Christ et qu'il a exercé en lui (sa) force, ou non?*' Ibid.
23. '*Comme Moïse et comme (chac)un des autres saints*.' Ibid., pp. 271/201.
24. Ibid., pp. 271–2/201–2.
25. See Qur'ān 43:61, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3.34.425, and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1:302.
26. Theodore bar Koni, *Livre des scolies (recension de Séert)*, pp. 271–2/201–2.
27. '*Il faut que tu saches clairement que c'est parce qu'il allait ressusciter qu'il l'éleva sur le bois, afin que par sa croix et par sa mort il ralliât tous les esprits rationnels à la merveille de sa résurrection*.' Ibid., pp. 271–2/202.
28. *'C'est en effet la coutume de Dieu de montrer sa force par des choses faibles, pour qu'on sache que 'la faiblesse de Dieu est plus forte que les hommes'. Mais si par ces (choses) Dieu n'a pas été diminué, mais advantage exalté, la croix de notre Vivicateur ne mérite pas d'être moquée; elle est {en vérité} 'force de Dieu et sagesse de Dieu."* Ibid., pp. 272/202.
29. Herman Teule, 'Theodore bar Koni', in D. Thomas and B. Roggema (eds), *CMR*, *Vol. 1 (600–900)* (Leiden, 2006), p. 344.
30. Theodore Bar Koni, *Livre des scolies (recension d'Urmiah)*, ed. and trans. R. Hespel, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 447–8 (Louvain, 1983), pp. 139/100–1 (edition/translation).
31. '*. . . à travers ce que l'on voit nous comemorons notre Seigneur le Christ qui par sa passion a opéré pour nous nous la redemption*.' Ibid., pp. 139/101.

32. 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, *Risālah*, from the unpublished translation by Anton Tien, edited slightly in N.A. Newman (ed.), *The Early Christian–Muslim Dialogue* (Hatfield, Pennsylvania, 1993), p. 400. Both figures in the debate may be rhetorical inventions intended to provide a context for theological exchange.
33. Cf. Sidney H. Griffith, 'Disputing with Islam in Syriac', *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* iii/1 (2000), pp. 38–9.
34. Al-Kindī's explanation for cross veneration lacks any attack upon Islam, though earlier in his text al-Kindī focuses on what he alleges are the idolatrous roots of Islam. He compares the *Ḥajj* to pilgrimages in India and refers to a tradition whereby Caliph 'Umar, when he venerated the Black Stone of the Ka'bah, said 'I know that you are both stones, you cannot help or hurt, yet I have seen the Apostle of God kiss you, and I will do the same' (al-Kindī, pp. 474–5). The implication for al-Kindī was that Islam had hardly covered over the idolatrous – and powerless – roots of Islamic piety. For the Islamic tradition referred to by al-Kindī, see Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī 2.26.675 and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 15:273. See also A.T. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 275–81 and G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 85. Besides noting al-Kindī's argument, Hawting also notes a similar argument by the celebrated twelfth-century Jewish intellectual Judah Halevi who interprets the Deuteronomic prophecy concerning the worship of 'other gods, of wood and of stone' (Deuteronomy 4:28) as the wood of the cross for Christians and the Black Stone for the Muslims (see ibid., pp. 85–6, 106 and Hawting, '*Širk* and "Idolatry"', pp. 124–5).
35. Al-Kindī, pp. 491–2.
36. Ibid., p. 492.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *A Response to the Arabs*, ed. and trans. J.P. Amar, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 614–5 (Louvain, 2005), pp. 92/85 (edition/translation).
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., pp. 92–4/85–6.
44. Ibid., pp. 93/85.
45. Ibid., pp. 93/86. Cf. Leontius' remark, quoted in Chapter 1, directed at Jewish interlocutors: 'You [venerate] the book of the Law, but you do not [venerate] the parchments and the ink but the words of God contained therein'. Cf. also the comments made by John of Damascus in his *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons* concerning the 'ink and the all-holy book of the Gospels' that Christians honoured. He offers this in a long list of other items made of 'matter' that ought to be proscribed if others were intent on

eliminating the use of images in worship. See John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, pp. 29–30.

46. See Herman Teule, 'The Veneration of Images in the East Syriac Tradition', in B. Groneberg and H. Spieckermann (eds), *Der Welt der Götterbilder* (Berlin, 2007), p. 338.
47. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, pp. 93/86.
48. Ibid. Bar Ṣalībī does not refer to the Ka'bah by name, but refers to the '*qiblah*', the directional marker, usually indicated by a special niche in a mosque's wall, pointing Muslims towards the Ka'bah in Mecca. From Bar Ṣalībī's description, however, it is clear that he is referring specifically in this passage to the Ka'bah. For more on the *qiblah* in the context of these arguments, see the discussion in Chapter 4.
49. Herman Teule, 'Išo'yabh bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages* (Beirut, 2007), p. 163.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., p. 163, n. 27. Cf. the East-Syrian Isaac of Nineveh who, in the seventh century, reflects on the mystery of the cross and remarks that whenever believers gaze upon the cross, 'it is as though they were contemplating the face (*parṣopā*) of Christ'. Further on, Isaac writes, 'And whenever we approach the Cross, it is as though we are brought close to the body of Christ'. See Isaac of Nineveh, '"The Second Part", Chapters IV–XLI', ed. and trans. S. Brock, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 554–5 (Louvain, 1995), pp. 48/58 (edition/translation).
52. See Chapter 1, nn. 37 and 38.
53. Teule, 'Išo'yabh bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', pp. 164–5.
54. Ibid., p. 165.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., pp. 165–6. Cf. a similar argument in John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, p. 38.
57. Teule, 'Išo'yahb bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', p. 167 where Teule writes that Bar Malkon 'considers [Muslim] worship positively as symbolic acts of adoration of God'.
58. Alexander Nicoll, 'Account of a Disputation between A Christian Monk and Three Learned Mohammedans on the Subject of Religion', *Edinburgh Annual Register ad annum 1816*, Vol. 9 (1820), p. 427; Constantine Bacha (Qusṭanṭīn Bāshā), *Mujādalat al-anbā Jirjī l-rāhib al-Sim'ānī ma' thalāthat shuyūkh min fuqahā' al-Muslimīn bi-ḥaḍrat al-amīr Mushammar al-Ayyūbī* (Beirut, 1932), pp. 67–8.
59. Nicoll, p. 428; Bacha, p. 68.
60. Ibid. Bacha's edition has '*al-shakl wa-l-mithāl*', i.e., a symbol and a shape'.
61. See Barbara Roggema, 'Ḥikāyāt amthal wa-asmār . . . King Parables in Melkite Apologetic Literature', in R. Ebied and H. Teule (eds), *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage* (Leuven, 2004).

62. Nicoll, pp. 428–9; Bacha, pp. 70–1.
63. Nicoll, pp. 429–30; Bacha, p. 73.
64. Nicoll, p. 430; Bacha, p. 73.
65. Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, *Kitāb al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb Naṣā'iḥ*, ed. M. Jirjis (Cairo, 1926/7), p. 121. Cf. the *Majmū' uṣūl al-dīn* (*Compendium of the Principles of Religion*), a thirteenth-century text by al-Ṣafī's half-brother, Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl. Al-Mu'taman engages with a number of scholars in this text, including al-Safī. See *Majmū' uṣūl al-dīn wa-masmū' maḥṣūl al-yaqīn (Summa dei principi della religion)*, ed. A. Wadi and trans. B. Pirone, 6 vols (Cairo, 1998–2002).
66. Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, *Kitāb al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb Naṣā'iḥ*, pp. 121–2.
67. Daniel J. Sahas, 'Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980), p. 417.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 423.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. For more on this kind of typological exegesis, especially legends of the wood of the cross in texts from the medieval Latin West, see Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 289–349.
73. See Peter W. Martens, 'Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* xvi/3 (Fall 2008), pp. 283–317.
74. See Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982) and Cyril Aphrem Karim, *Symbols of the Cross in the Writings of the Early Syriac Fathers* (Piscataway, NJ, 2004).
75. Jeffery, p. 322.
76. Ibid.
77. '*. . . dis-moi, l'arche de l'alliance, la considères-tu comme Dieu ou comme un bois muet?*' Theodore Bar Koni, *Livre des scolies (recension de Séert)*, pp. 268/200.
78. 'Jésus bar Noun 'qu'il se jeta sur sa face par terre devant l'arche du Seigneur', ou non?" Ibid.
79. *'Est-ce le bois qu'il adorait, ou Dieu?'* Ibid., pp. 269/200.
80. Ibid., pp. 269–70/200–1. In this part of the argument, Bar Koni refers to the parting of the Jordan River (Joshua 3:17) and the tumbling of the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:20), both actions occurring because of the Ark's presence.
81. These arguments are almost entirely the same as those from Isaac of Nineveh. See Isaac of Nineveh, '"The Second Part", Chapters IV–XLI', pp. 44/54, 46–7/56.
82. In addition to his references to the Ka'bah, Bar Malkon also refers to the Ark of the Covenant, noting that through it Jews glorified God. In the same way, Christians glorified God through the cross. See Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et*

musulmans en Irak: Attitudes nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'Islam (Paris, 1994), pp. 296–7.

83. For more on the Ark of the Covenant in the Qur'ān, see Uri Rubin, 'Traditions in Transformation: The Ark of the Covenant and the Golden Calf in Biblical and Islamic Historiography', *Oriens* 36 (2001), pp. 196–214.
84. Isaac of Nineveh, '"The Second Part", Chapters IV–XLI', pp. 44/54.
85. Al-Kindī, p. 492. Al-Kindī references Moses (in addition to Joshua, David and the children of Israel) throughout his argument. For more on the role of Moses in these discussions, see below.
86. Jeffery, p. 322.
87. Ibid.
88. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 'σημεῖον', in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids, MI, 1999), p. 208. See also Larry W. Hurtado, 'The Staurogram in Early Christian Manuscripts: The Earliest Visual Reference to the Crucified Jesus?', in T.J. Kraus and T. Nicklas (eds), *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Text and Their World* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 220–1 and 221, n. 43; Bruce Longenecker, *The Cross before Constantine: The Early Life of a Christian Symbol* (Minneapolis, 2015); Erich Dinkler, 'Comments on the History of the Symbol of the Cross', *Journal for Theology and the Church* 1 (1965), pp. 124–46; and Richard Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2006), p. 42.
89. See, e.g., Tertullian, 'Against Marcion', 3:22, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3 (Peabody, 1999), pp. 340–1. On Origen, see ibid., p. 340, n. 14. See also Hurtado, pp. 220–1.
90. Jeffery, p. 322.
91. Ibid.
92. Nicoll, p. 428; Bacha, p. 69.
93. Similarly, the fourth-century hymnist and teacher Ephrem the Syrian explains the meaning of a Christian symbol comprised of the Greek letters *tau-rho* with *alpha* and *omega* placed under the horizontal arms of the *tau*. According to Ephrem, the symbol is the cross of Jesus and Moses' outstretched hands in Exodus 17:11 are an Old Testament type for this kind of cross. See Franz Joseph Dölger, *Sol salutis: Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Ostung in Gebet und Liturgie* (Münster im Westfalen, 1925), p. 74, n. 2 and Hurtado, p. 221.
94. Sahas, 'Captivity and Dialogue', p. 423.
95. Ibid.
96. Mingana, p. 40.
97. "*les Hébreux, par le serpent d'airain que Moïse avait mis en croix* [. . .] *C'étaient là des symboles de la croix du Christ*." Theodore bar Koni, *Livre des scolies (recension de Séert)*, pp. 272/202. Bar Koni also comments here on God saving 'the people of Egypt by a lamb' (*le Peuple de l'Égypte par un agneau*), referring to the first Passover (Exodus 12:1–13). Hespel and Draguet, Corpus Scriptorum, pp. 272/202.

98. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, pp. 92/85.
99. Nicoll, p. 428; Bacha, p. 69. The notion that the serpent on the pole is a type for the cross is not unique, but the way this description appears in Jirjī's disputation, as far as I am able to tell, is unique. In Nicoll's translation, Moses fixes the serpent to the pole lengthwise first, then crosswise. In Bacha's Arabic edition, Moses simply places the serpent on a 'long pole' (*rammaḥ ṭawīl*). Then God commands Moses to put the serpent on the pole crosswise or horizontally (*'arḍan*). At this point, Jirjī points out (in Bacha's edition) that the serpent upon the pole became an image of the cross. As yet, there is no edition of Jirjī's disputation that is based on all of the available manuscripts. A full examination of the manuscripts must be completed in order to discern if the typological exegesis in the disputation here is unique in the way it describes Moses placing the serpent on the pole lengthwise and then crosswise or if a scribe has inserted this idea. In either case, it could be that the author of the disputation (or a later scribe of some manuscripts) has inadvertently amplified the story of Moses in an effort to highlight the way in which the serpent on the pole is a type of the cross. In this case, instead of the serpent merely being fixed to the pole, the serpent is essentially crucified upon the pole, an act made explicit in Jirjī's telling of the event (cf. Tertullian's reference to Moses placing a serpent 'on a "tree," in a hanging posture'. Tertullian, 'An Answer to the Jews', X, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3 (Peabody, 1999), p. 166.
100. Rengstorf, pp. 208–9.
101. Justin Martyr, 'The First Apology of Justin', p. 60, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Peabody, 1999), p. 183. See also Hurtado, p. 220.
102. Rengstorf, pp. 208–9.
103. Longenecker, p. 71.
104. Sahas, 'Captivity and Dialogue', p. 417.
105. Quoted in Hoyland, pp. 100–1. For more on Anastasius, see Sidney Griffith, 'Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* xxxii/4 (1987), pp. 341–58.
106. Hoyland, p. 101.
107. Ibid.
108. '*en raison de la redemption qui y eut lieu pour nous*.' Theodore bar Koni, *Livre des scolies (recension d'Urmiah)*, pp. 139/100.
109. '*la dissolution de tous les maux qui nous a été donné par* [*sa*] *mediation, dissolution qui* (*s'est faite*) *par la destruction du péché, la confusion des demons, l'apaisement des souffrances naturelles, la resurrection des morts et la jouissance de la vie nouvelle*.' Ibid.
110. Al-Kindī, p. 493.
111. Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, *Kitāb al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb Naṣā'iḥ*, pp. 121–2.
112. Nicoll, p. 427; Bacha, p. 68.
113. Nicoll, p. 428; Bacha, pp. 68–9.
114. Nicoll, p. 428; Bacha, p. 69.

115. Krisztina Szilágyi, 'The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias', in S. Noble and A. Treiger (eds), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700–1700: An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb, IL, 2014), p. 106.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
118. Similarly, in the late ninth or early tenth century Peter of Bayt Ra's writes in his *Kitāb al-burhān* (*The Proof*) that, 'Christ has given us the cross as an efficacious weapon, effective in fire, air, water and earth; and nothing keeps it back from [operating on] these. [He has also given it to us] as a power which nothing can withstand, and from which the devils flee wherever its sign is made [. . .] The cross is the engraving [on the seal] of the King of Kings, the impression of which nothing in creation can see without responding and obeying [. . .] It is a protection for them against all evil, a repellent of all harm, a source of strength for the weak, and a remedy in every affair in the name of Christ, who was willingly crucified on it and thereby saved creation'. See Eutychius of Alexandria [Peter of Bayt Ra's], *The Book of Demonstration (Kitāb al-Burhān)*, Part 1, ed. P. Cachia and trans. W.M. Watt, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 192–3 (Louvain, 1960), pp. 158/128 (translation/edition). For more on Peter of Bayt Ra's and his *Kitāb al-burhān*, see the discussion in the Conclusion. Cf. Mark N. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', in S.K. Samir and J.S. Nielsen (eds), *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 136–7. See also the numerous ways in which the cross is used to demonstrate power in *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, and in particular, the contributions in it attributed to John the Deacon from around 770. See Mark N. Swanson, 'Folly to the *Ḥunafā*': The Crucifixion in Early Christian–Muslim Controversy', in E. Grypeou, M.N. Swanson and D. Thomas (eds), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 240–3. The seventh-century writings of Isaac of Nineveh, and in particular his reflections on the mystery of the cross, contain similar attributions of power to the cross. See Isaac of Nineveh, '"The Second Part", Chapters IV–XLI', pp. 45/55.
119. Szilágyi, p. 107.
120. The exchange that follows is similar to several stages of a proposed power encounter between Jirjī the monk and his Muslim interlocutors. They seem to posture back and forth concerning a suitable test of power without ever actually engaging in one. These proposed tests include putting two pieces of paper in a box, one with the name of God and Muḥammad written on it and the other with the name of God and the Messiah written on it. After the monk and the Muslims pronounce the name of God over the box, whichever paper no longer contains the names will be the one whose religion is false. A second test would involve being thrown into a fire. Whoever remains unburned represents the true faith. A final test involves washing in water, the remains of which are placed in separate vessels. Whichever vessel of water is

contaminated represents the false faith. In the account of Jirjī's debate the Muslims avoid each potential contest in ways that suggest that they are aware that they are not capable of winning the contest. Thus, the power contest is merely rhetorical, though it ends with a clear winner. See Nicoll, pp. 438–9; Bacha, pp. 99–103.

121. Ibid.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid., pp. 108–9.
124. Ibid., p. 109.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid., pp. 109–10.
127. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', pp. 135–9.
128. See Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī 7.71.645.
129. Ibid., pp. 136–7. Such would be the case for Peter of Bayt Ra's and his *Kitāb al-burhān* and John the Deacon's contribution to *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* as well, for which see n. 118 above.
130. Jeffery, pp. 322–3.
131. Ibid., p. 323.
132. Of course, Elias II is referring specifically to icons, not the cross *per se*. Also, as we have seen, Ibrāhīm's reference to the Ka'bah was not offered as a means for helpfully illuminating anything, but for setting up a power contest. Even so, the comment lacks invective.

Chapter 4 Making the Cross a *Qiblah* and a Proxy for Christ

1. Mark N. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', in S.K. Samir and J.S. Nielsen (eds), *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)* (Leiden, 1994), p. 138.
2. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, 'Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', in S.T. Keating (ed. and trans.), *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'iṭah*, ed. and trans. Sandra Toenies Keating (Leiden, 2006), pp. 130–5.
3. Ibid., pp. 130–3.
4. The critical method of mirror-reading is given helpful analysis by John M.G. Barclay in 'Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987), pp. 73–93.
5. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, 'Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', pp. 132–3.
6. Ibid. Cf. the remarks on the 'form' and 'shape' of the cross in Chapter 3.
7. Ibid.
8. Jeffery, p. 322.

9. Theodore bar Koni, *Livre des Scolies (recension de Séert)*, ed. and trans. R. Hespel and R. Draguet, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 431–2 (Louvain, 1982), pp. 270/201 (edition/translation). 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, *Risālah*, in N.A. Newman (ed.), *The Early Christian–Muslim Dialogue* (Hatfield, 1993), p. 492.
10. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *A Response to the Arabs*, ed. and trans. J.P. Amar, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 614–15 (Louvain, 2005), pp. 93/86 (edition/translation). Alex Nicoll, 'Account of a Disputation between A Christian Monk and Three Learned Mohammedans on the Subject of Religion', *Edinburgh Annual Register ad annum 1816*, Vol. 9 (1820), p. 428; Constantine Bacha (Qusṭanṭīn Bāshā), *Mujādalat al-anbā Jirjī l-rāhib al-Sim'ānī ma' thalāthat shuyūkh min fuqahā' al-Muslimīn bi-ḥaḍrat al-amīr Mushammar al-Ayyūbī* (Beirut, 1932), p. 68.
11. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, 'Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', pp. 82–91. The East-Syrian Theodore bar Koni also emphasises the paradoxicality of Christian faith in his discussion of the weakness Christ turned to strength through the cross. See the discussion in Chapter 3.
12. See Marlia Mundell, 'Monophysite Church Decoration', in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds), *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Birmingham, 1977), pp. 59–74 and Sebastian Brock, 'Iconoclasm and the Monophysites', in idem, pp. 53–7.
13. See Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden, 2009).
14. For the monk Baḥīrā in the life (*Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, see Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's* Sirat Rasul Allah (Karachi, 1967), pp. 79–81.
15. For more succinct details, see Barbara Roggema, 'The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā', in D. Thomas and B. Roggema (eds), *CMR, Vol. 1 (600–900)* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 600–3.
16. In a recension Roggema calls the 'short Arabic recension', the monk is said to preach to people in Armenia. See Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, pp. 388–9. This seems unlikely since the monk goes to Arabia after being chased from the area.
17. This version appears in the East-Syrian recension in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, pp. 266–7 (the passage as it appears in the shorter and longer Arabic recensions, in ibid., pp. 388–9 and pp. 444–5 respectively, generally follows the East-Syrian recension).
18. Ibid., pp. 312–13.
19. Ibid., pp. 312–15.
20. See Stephen Gero, 'The Legend of the Monk Baḥīrā, the Cult of the Cross, and Iconoclasm', in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe–VIIIe siècles. Actes du colloque international, Lyon-Maison de l'Orient*

Méditerranéen, Paris-Institut du Monde Arabe, 11–15 September 1990 (Damascus, 1992), pp. 47–58. Cf. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 96.

21. See Gero, 'The Legend of the Monk Baḥīrā' and Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, p. 97.
22. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, pp. 97–8.
23. Ibid., p. 101.
24. On this point, cf. ibid., p. 104.
25. Ibid.
26. Cf., David Thomas, 'al-Ṣalīb', in C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, Vol. 8 (Leiden, 1995), p. 981 and Sidney H. Griffith, 'Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century', in *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim–Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Burlington, 2002), p. 200.
27. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, 'Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', pp. 132–3.
28. Ibid., pp. 132–5. Abū Rā'iṭah's use of the word *qiblah* to describe the cross situates his argument in an Islamic milieu, but there was also a context already in place for Eastern Christians to consider the cross as a symbol, painted on the eastern walls of homes in order to mark the direction of prayer. See Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. J.A. Baker (London, 1964), pp. 268–9.
29. Ibid., pp. 132–3.
30. Ibid., pp. 134–5.
31. The very next topic in Abū Rā'iṭah's text is the cardinal direction Christian's face in prayer (east). See ibid., pp. 134–7. Like the cross as a *qiblah*, facing east for prayer, according to Abū Rā'iṭah, was an act that helped to distinguish Christians from other religionists.
32. Ibid., pp. 134–5.
33. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, pp. 93/86.
34. Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, *Al-Naṣīḥa l-imāniyyah fī faḍīḥat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyyah* (*Faithful Counsel Concerning the Ignominy of the Christian Religion*), as quoted in Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity', *Harvard Theological Review* lxxxix/1 (1996), p. 78.
35. J. Pedersen, 'Minbar', in C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzell, W.P. Heinrichs and Ch. Pellat (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, Vol. 7 (Leiden, 1993), pp. 73–6.
36. 'Abdisho' also mentions the many miracles performed in connection with the cross and compares Christians' veneration of it to Muslim veneration of the

Ka'bah. See Bénéndicte Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak: Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'Islam* (Paris, 1994), p. 238 and Herman Teule, "Abdisho' of Nisibis', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds), *CMR*, *Vol. 4 (1200–1350)* (Leiden, 2012), p. 760.

37. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, 'Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', pp. 132–3.
38. In the passage Abū Rā'iṭah refers to (Matthew 24:29–31), darkness covers the earth and the sign (*sēmeion*) of the Son of Man appears, causing all of the tribes of the earth to mourn, a reference to Zechariah 12:10 where the tribes of Israel mourn the one they pierced (*eth asher daqaru*). Then the tribes will see Christ returning in power and glory along with his angels to gather the elect. The argument Abū Rā'iṭah uses here is offered a century earlier in the *Drāshā da-hwā l-ḥad men Ṭayyāyē 'am iḥidyā ḥad b-'umrā d-Bēt Ḥālē* (*The Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable*), where the author of the account appears to depend on a Syriac tradition of commentary on the cross as the pre-eschatological sign of Christ. For commentary on this disputation, see my remarks in the Conclusion.
39. Cf., e.g., Qur'ān 2:168, 208; 7:22; 17:53; 36:60; 43:62.
40. See Lactantius, 'The Divine Institutes', VII.19, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7 (Peabody, 1999), p. 215.
41. Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche. Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Apocalypse* (Göttingen, 1895), p. 155. See also Daniélou, pp. 268–70.
42. Ibid., p. 267 and Bousset, p. 156.
43. Ibid., p. 157.
44. Ibid. and Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 'σημεῖον', in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 7, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1999), p. 261.
45. Mark N. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.*, PhD diss., The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (1992, revised 1995), p. 294. Cf. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3.34.425.
46. As quoted in Teule, 'Išo'yahb bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icon's', in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages* (Beirut, 2007), p. 164. In his third *Oration*, John remarks, 'Many times I have seen those who long for someone, when they have seen his garment, greet it with their eyes and lips, as if it were the one longed for himself' (John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. A. Louth [Crestwood, NY, 2003], p. 92). John makes no scriptural reference, but one is tempted to connect the statement with the story of Jacob and Joseph's tunic as Isho'yahb does here. Leontius makes the same argument and mentions Jacob and Joseph's bloody tunic explicitly. See Norman H. Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', *The Harvard Theological Review* xliv/2 (April 1951), p. 100.

47. Teule, 'Išo'yahb bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', p. 164.
48. Landron, p. 238. See also Teule, "Abdisho' of Nisibis', p. 760.
49. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', p. 141.
50. Ibid. Cf. similar comments from the East-Syrian Isho'yahb bar Malkon, whose remarks are similar to those from Isaac of Ninevah, as discussed in Chapter 3 (n. 51). In particular, Isaac of Nineveh compares the cross with the Ark of the Covenant, claiming that God's Shekhinah glory is present in the cross. See Isaac of Nineveh, '"The Second Part", Chapters IV–XLI', ed. and trans. S. Brock, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 554–5 (Louvain, 1995), pp. 44/54 and 46–7/56 (edition/translation) (though on pp. 48/58 he is less explicit, claiming that in looking upon the cross it is 'as though' Christians were gazing upon Christ or drawing near to his body). It is interesting to note here that Isaac's writings were read by Christians outside of his East-Syrian tradition and his reflection in 'The Second Part' are known in Melkite communities. See Brock's comments in Isaac of Nineveh, '"The Second Part", Chapters IV–XLI', ed. and trans. S. Brock, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 555 (Louvain, 1995), p. xvi. Incidentally, the comments from Isaac and Bar Malkon are also similar to those made by a monk in a disputation with an Arab notable, for which see the discussion in the Conclusion.
51. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, p. 270.
52. Quoted in Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, 2008), pp. 58–9. As Swanson notes, it also appears in *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* that the author and his Melkite community exist in a context of worship where icons are (perhaps forcibly) absent. It could be that the author's comments on the cross reflect this environment. See Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, pp. 40, 269–70.
53. 'Canones Concilii Nicaeni LXXX ex Arabico in Latinum interprete Turriano', in J. D. Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, Vol. 2 (Florence, 1759), 977E–980B. See also Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden, 1996), p. 10.
54. Ernst Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), p. 142.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., p. 143.
57. Ibid.
58. Cf. Chapter 2, n. 41.
59. Kitzinger, p. 143.
60. Ibid., pp. 145–6.
61. Ibid., pp. 141, 146–7.

62. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum Ducem*, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 28 (Paris, 1857), p. 621. See also Baynes, 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', p. 101.
63. As quoted in Sidney H. Griffith, 'The First *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in Ninth-Century Palestine', in M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (eds), *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto, 1990), p. 19. See also ibid., pp. 21–3.
64. Ibid., p. 19.
65. Griffith, 'The First *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic', p. 26.
66. Ibid., p. 24.
67. Sidney H. Griffith, 'Islam and the *Summa theologiae arabica*; Rabī' I, 264 A.H.', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), p. 233. See also ibid., p. 234.
68. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', p. 140.
69. Sidney Griffith, 'The Arabic Account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ an-Naǧrānī al-Ghassānī', *Le Muséon* 98 (1985), pp. 331–74.
70. Mark N. Swanson, 'The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ, Superior of Mount Sinai (Qays al-Ghassānī)', in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 121–4.
71. See Swanson's comment on the 'importance of the sign of the cross as the *distinguishing* mark of Christian prayer' (emphasis in original) in *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, pp. 292–3, n. 30.
72. Swanson, 'Al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān', in D. Thomas and B. Roggema (eds), *CMR, Vol. 1 (600–900)* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 793–4 and Griffith, 'Islam and the *Summa theologiae arabica*', p. 240. Cf. Griffith, 'The First Christian *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic', p. 23 and idem, 'The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early 'Abbāsid Period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* vii/1 (1996), p. 18.
73. As quoted in Griffith, 'The First *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic', p. 19.
74. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', p. 137.
75. Ibid., p. 141.
76. Griffith, 'Islam and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*', p. 250.
77. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', p. 141.
78. Ibid., p. 137. In his comparison with the Ka'bah, the author notes that Muslims pray towards it, but not on top of it towards heaven as they pray on top of mosques. His point is that Muslims distinguish between normal material objects, such as the buildings in which they pray, and objects that have special value as sacred signifiers, such as the Ka'bah. Accepting this point would force Muslims to accept that Christians are also capable of distinguishing between a mere object and something set apart to direct worshipers toward God. See Griffith, 'Islam and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*', p. 250 and Jamal J. Elias,

Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam (Cambridge, MA, 2012), pp. 70–1.

79. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', p. 141.
80. Ibid., p. 144.
81. Theodore Abū Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, trans. S. Griffith, Eastern Christian Texts in Translation, Vol. 1 (Louvain, 1997), pp. 93–6.
82. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', p. 138.
83. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, 'Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', pp. 132–3.
84. Ibid., pp. 98–9. Cf. Qur'ān 6:154.
85. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, 'Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', pp. 98–9.
86. Ibid., pp. 100–1.
87. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, p. 292.
88. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, pp. 93/86.
89. Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, *Al-Naṣīḥa l-imāniyyah fī faḍīḥat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyyah*, as quoted in Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity', p. 78.
90. Abū Rā'iṭah al-Takrītī, Fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-Thālūth al-maqaddas', pp. 132–3.
91. Mark N. Swanson, 'An Apology for the Christian Faith', in S. Noble and A. Treiger (eds), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700–1700: An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb, Illinois, 2014), p. 58. Cf. idem, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā', pp. 293–4.
92. Ibid., p. 294. Cf. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3.34.425 and n. 45 above.
93. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, p. 294.
94. See Herman Teule, 'Jacob bar Shakkō', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds), *CMR*, *Vol. 4 (1200–1350)* (Leiden, 2012), p. 243.
95. Swanson, *Folly to the* Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy*, p. 292.

Conclusion A Eulogy for the Life of a Theological and Political Idea

1. Sidney Griffith, '"Melkites", "Jacobites" and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria', in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years* (Leiden, 2001), p. 28.
2. Gerrit J. Reinink, 'Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable', in

E. Grypeou, M.N. Swanson and D. Thomas (eds), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden, 2006), p. 160.

3. David G.K. Taylor, ed. and trans., 'The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation', in S.H. Griffith and S. Grebenstein (eds), *Christsein in der islamischen Welt. Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Gebertstag* (Wiesbaden, 2015), p. 208.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 223.
6. Ibid., pp. 223–4.
7. Ibid., p. 224.
8. Ibid., p. 225.
9. Ibid., p. 227.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 228. Here, the monk mentions the miraculous *Mandylion* of which the Muslim is well aware (see ibid., pp. 228–9 and Chapter 2, n. 41).
12. Taylor, p. 229.
13. On the monk's apparent reference to the Qur'ān, see Sidney H. Griffith, 'Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and A Muslim Emir', *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* iii/1 (2000), p. 47.
14. See a similar comment made by Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl regarding the precedent set for cross veneration by the Apostles. *Kitāb al-ṣaḥā'iḥ fī jawāb Naṣā'iḥ*, ed. M. Jirjis (Cairo, 1926/1927), p. 121.
15. Taylor, p. 230.
16. Ibid. For these kinds of examples in the Syriac tradition, see Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Faith*, in E. Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 154–5 (Louvain, 1955) and Narsai, 'Homily 30', in A. Mingana (ed.), *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, Vol. 2 (Mosul, 1905), p. 121. Similar reflection appears in the Melkite Peter of Bayt Ra's' *Kitāb al-burhān*, on which, see below.
17. Taylor, pp. 230–1.
18. Ibid., p. 231.
19. The monk follows Ephrem the Syrian here again (see n. 16 above) for his comments on the cross as Christ's sign for his return. See Ephrem the Syrian, *Sermo* II, in E. Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones III*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 320–1 (Louvain, 1972), pp. 18–9/309–12, 341–2 (edition/translation). In particular, the monk states that the Jews will see the cross coming in eschatological glory and be ashamed. A similar argument appears in the seventh century in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (though in this text the Jews are not identified specifically). See a translation in Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 50 and Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Berkeley, 2015), p. 127 (the monk employs other arguments taken from the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* as well [see Reinink, 'Political Power and

Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable']). As the monk goes on, a similar scenario was acted out with Constantine at the battle of the Milvian bridge where the cross not only miraculously appeared, but also demonstrated its power in the defeat of Constantine's enemies. See Taylor, pp. 231–2 and Griffith, 'Disputing with Islam in Syriac', p. 48. Given the juxtaposition of Jews and Constantine in the monk's remark, Reinink sees a 'veiled down-playing of the political relevance of the Arab rule', though the monk does not echo the destruction of Arab rule as in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. See Reinink's remarks in 'The Veneration of Icons, the Cross, and the Bones of the Martyrs in an Early East-Syrian Apology against Islam', in D. Bumazhnov, E. Grypeou, T.B. Sailors and A. Toepel (eds), *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient. Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65. Gebertstag* (Leuven, 2011), pp. 337–8.

20. Taylor, p. 232.
21. For very similar comments, again from the East-Syrian tradition and from the seventh century, see the reflections on the mystery of the cross by Isaac of Ninevah. See Paulus Bedjan, *Mar Isaacus Ninivita de perfectione religiosa* (Paris, 1909), pp. 589–600 and See Isaac of Nineveh, '"The Second Part", Chapters IV–XLI', ed. and trans. S. Brock, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 554–5 (Louvain, 1995), pp. 44/54, 46–7/56 and 48/58 (edition/translation). Here, the cross and Christ's presence in it is compared to God's presence in the Ark of the Covenant. Similar remarks appear in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition. See Reinink, 'The Veneration of Icons, the Cross, and the Bones of the Martyrs in an Early East-Syrian Apology against Islam', pp. 334, 338.
22. Taylor, p. 235.
23. Ibid., p. 241.
24. David Bertaina, "The Development of Testimony Collections in Early Christian Apologetics with Islam', in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden, 2007), p. 172.
25. Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), p. 81.
26. Ibid., pp. 540–1.
27. See a translation of Ibn Taymiyyah's *Al-jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* in *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*, ed. and trans. T.M. Michel (Ann Arbor, MI, 1985), pp. 148–52. In this text, Ibn Taymiyyah is responding to the claims made by a Christian author in a letter sent to him from Cyprus. For this letter, a version of which was also sent to al-Dimashqī, see Rifaat Ebied and David Thomas, *Muslim–Christian Polemic During the Crusades* (Leiden, 2005).
28. Of course, Jewish readers might also be unconvinced by these arguments in *Adversus Judaeos* texts, but at least in these cases both Jews and Christians did not see the Hebrew Tanakh/Old Testament as in any way corrupt. There may have only been disagreement upon the hermeneutic that Christians employed.

29. A similar dynamic is present in 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's defence of the Eucharist in his *Kitāb al-burhān*. Muslims appear to be concerned in his text with the notion that in the Eucharist is the body of Christ (see Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī's* Kitāb al-Burhān*: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century*, PhD diss., University of Birmingham, England [2013], p. 291). In his discussion, 'Ammār refrains from calling the Eucharist a 'sacrament', referring to it only as an 'offering' (*qurbān*). In turn, the elements of the Eucharist are not explained as the literal body and blood of Christ. 'Ammār writes that '[Christ] did not mean that the essence of that bread and that wine was his body and blood, for his teaching refers to the meaning of the life which was revealed in his body being resurrected from the grave, and to his victory over death' (see ibid., p. 405). It would seem that 'Ammār avoids the sacramental and mystical nature of the Eucharist so that he does not leave a door open for additional Muslim attack. See ibid., pp. 294–5. Otherwise, such a description of Christ's body and blood would seem unusual for 'Ammār's East-Syrian theological context. See Sidney H. Griffith, '"Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine": The Eucharist as "Living Medicine" in the Thought of Ephraem the Syrian', *Modern Theology* xv/2 (April 1999), pp. 229–33.
30. For similar reflections on the Eucharist from 'Ammar al-Baṣrī, see Mikhail, p. 299. The shaping effect of a given context, in this case the Islamic context, is noticeable in the absence of evidence from Christian texts from the western Mediterranean (in Latin or Arabic). Andalusī Muslims like Ibn Ḥazm, al-Khazrajī and al-Qurṭubī attack the cross and some mention cross veneration, but I am not aware of a Christian text from medieval western regions that defends the practice. This could be because cross veneration was not as central a practice in the Latin West as it was in the East. Or perhaps the context of debate between Christians and Muslims in these regions was not influenced in the same way as it was in the East. Even so, the influence Eastern Christian texts had on texts written, for example, in al-Andalus makes the absence of cross veneration as a topos of the literature intriguing. On the influence of Eastern Christian texts in the Western Mediterranean, see, for example, Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, 'A Nestorian Arabic Pentateuch Used in Western Lands', in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden, 2007); David Thomas, 'Explanations of the Incarnation in Early 'Abbasid Islam', in J.J. van Ginkel, H.L. Murre-van den Berg and T.M. van Lint (eds), *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interactions in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam* (Leuven, 2005), p. 139; and Juan Zozaya, 'Eastern Influences in al-Andalus', in M. Manuela (ed.), *The Formation of al-Andalus. Part 1: History and Society* (Brookfield, 1998). On some Sephardi Jewish criticism of Christian use of statues in worship (criticism that includes reflection on Moses and the serpent in the desert), see Ángel Sáenz-Badillos, 'Jewish and Christian Interpretations in Arragel's Biblical Glosses', in Ryan Szpiech (ed.), *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference:*

Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean (New York, 2015), p. 144.

31. Griffith, 'Disputing with Islam in Syriac', p. 38.
32. Ibid., p. 39.
33. Sidney H. Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times', in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, Actes du Colloque International Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Mediterranéen (Paris-Institut du Monde Arabe, 11–15 September 1990) (Damascus, 1992), pp. 134–5. But cf. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity', *Harvard Theological Review* lxxxix/1 (1996), p. 78, n. 69.
34. Taylor, p. 232.
35. Eutychius of Alexandria [Peter of Bayt Ra's], *The Book of Demonstration (Kitāb al-Burhān)*, Part 1, ed. P. Cachia and trans. W.M. Watt, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vols 192–3 (Louvain, 1960), pp. 128/158 (translation/edition).
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., pp. 128–9/159.
41. Ibid., pp. 129/159. For commentary on the wider history of reflection on the shape of the cross and its relationship to similar shapes, see Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. J.A. Baker (London, 1964), pp. 274–8, 290.

Appendix I A Summary of Sources

1. Georg Graf, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols (Studi e Testi, pp. 118, 133, 146, 147, 172) (Città del Vaticano, 1944–53). See also Rachid Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750–1050)* (Paris, 1985); Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du movement littéraire dans l'église melchite du Vè au XXè*, 4 vols (Louvain, 1988); Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak: Attitudes nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'Islam* (Paris, 1994); and Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 2002).
2. David Thomas, ed., *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* (Leiden, 2009–) (henceforth cited as *CMR*). There are presently seven volumes published in the series with several more to come. One can also consult Abdelmajid Charfi, 'La function historique de la polémique islamochrétienne à l'époque Abbasside', S.K. Samir and J.S. Nielsen (eds), *Christian Arabic*

Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258) (Leiden, 1994); Georges C. Anawati, 'Polémique, apologie et dialogue islamo-chrétien. Positions classiques médiévales et positions contemporaines', *Euntes Docete* 12 (1969), pp. 375–452 and Ali Bouamama, *La literature polémique musulmane contre le christianisme, depuis les origins jusqu'au XIIIè siècle* (Algiers, 1988). See also Ibn al-Nadim, *The Fihrist: A 10th Century AD Survey of Islamic Culture*, ed. and trans. B. Dodge (New York, 1970).

3. Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), p. 490.
4. Ibid.
5. Tim Greenwood, 'Ghewond', in D. Thomas and B. Roggema (eds), *CMR*, *Vol. 1 (600–900)* (Leiden, 2009), p. 868.
6. For a discussion of the issues, see Hoyland, pp. 491–5.
7. Ibid., p. 491.
8. See Barbara Roggema, 'Pseudo-Leo III's first letter to 'Umar II', in *CMR, Vol. 1*, pp. 375–6 and Mark N. Swanson, 'The Arabic Letter of Leo III to 'Umar II', in ibid., pp. 377–80.
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